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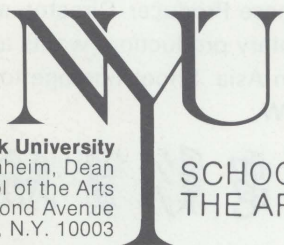
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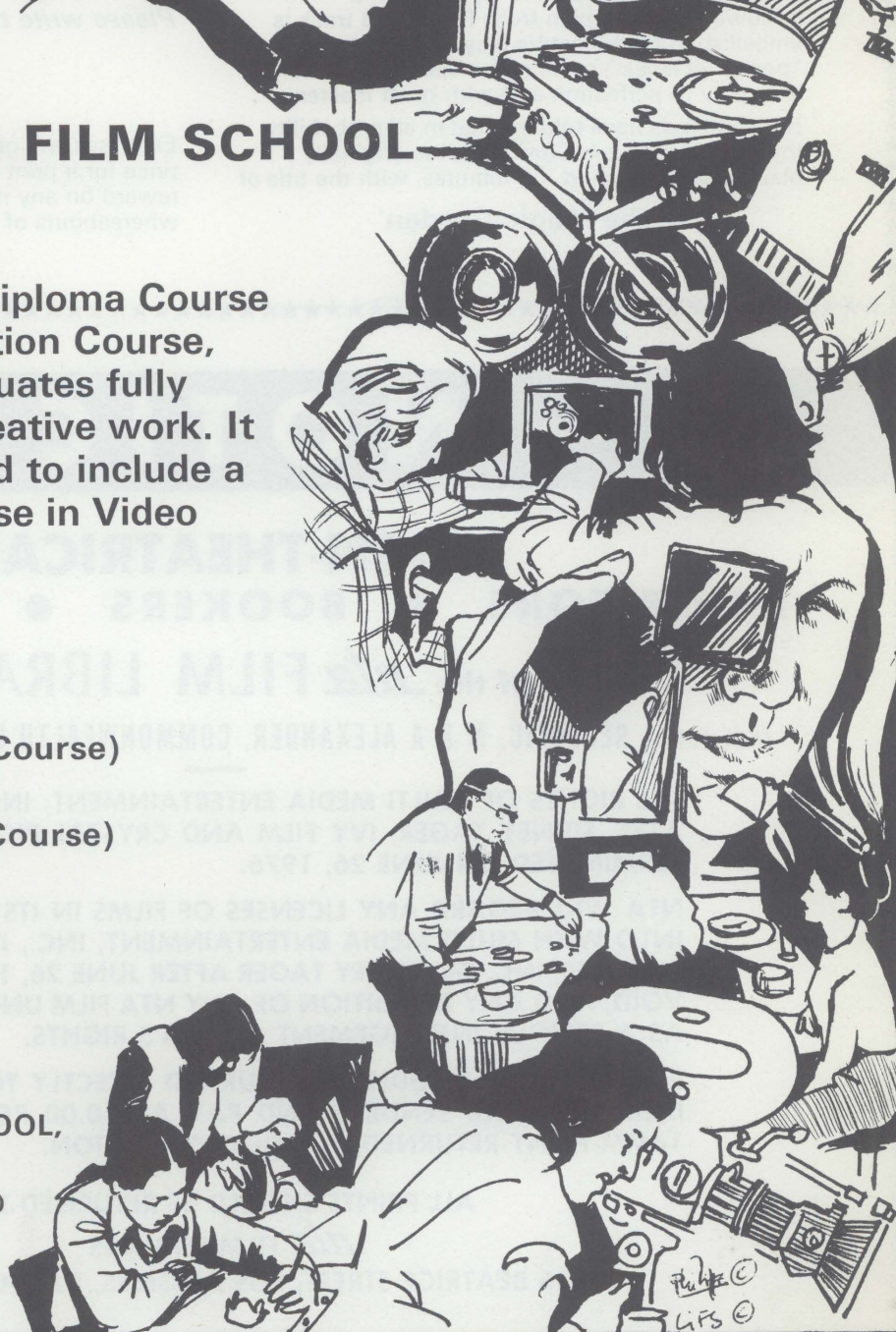
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A private collector of movie films, mainly early and contemporary comedies, is urgently on the lookout for a short musical comedy, played entirely by black non-professional actors and musicians, which he once saw about 1958 in a Paris cinema. He remembers the title as *Soupe à la Citrouille*, which means something like *Pumpkin Soup*. It was learned that this film had been made by a British film crew, clandestinely filming a feature or documentary film in South Africa, in the hinterland of Johannesburg or thereabouts. During a lull in their work, which had been hindered by the South African authorities then in charge, they made this short musical comedy. Its theme concerns a group of natives in search of a hidden treasure cache, thought to be found in a hollowed-out pumpkin fruit. The sound track is embellished by the actors playing so-called "penny whistles", small self-made flutes which they play to perfection and with great mastery. British friends have told me that in all probability this film, *Soupe à la Citrouille*, was originally a black and white short, 63 minutes, with the title of

'The Magic Garden'

directed in 1951 by Donald Swanson. It has been impossible for me to find out anything about Mr Swanson's address and the film seems not to have been released in Britain. Letters to the Motion Pictures Association of Southern Africa brought no response.

The film in question is — and is remembered as such — so marvellously made, so full of humour and drive, so finely played, that I should like to try anything to get a print for my private collection. I would appreciate any help given me in this matter, either by direct contact, by hinting at the present whereabouts of Mr D. Swanson, or by giving me the address of somebody who might know of a source for a print of the film, in 35 or 16 mm, either new or second-hand.

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SPRING 1977

Volume 46 No. 2

SIGHT AND SOUND

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*On the cover: Geraldine Chaplin
in James Ivory's 'Roseland'*

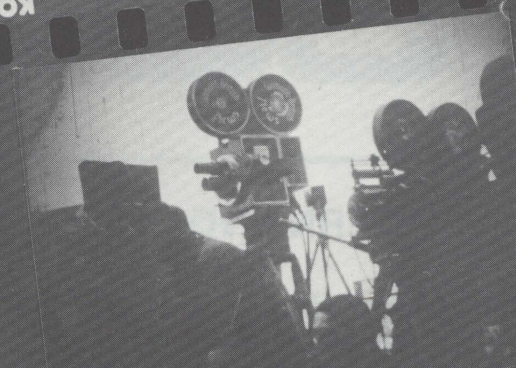
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Before Hindsight

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DOES NOT SHOW
Series 1



Jonathan Lewis

Using sequences of library footage with original soundtracks, if any, and interviews, we have examined in our film *Before Hindsight** the attitudes expressed by the non-fiction British cinema of the 1930s towards the events that led to the second World War. In this article, I would like to elaborate on some of the things we can learn about the concerns of people working in films during this period. One of the obstacles to date for anyone making this kind of survey has been the fact that a large body of left-wing film—the output of the Socialist Film Council and the Film and Photo League—has been missing and presumed lost.† In the course of making *Before Hindsight*, we found both archives intact and in good condition. This 'new' material confirmed the impression we received from both the newsreels and the other documentaries: that events in Germany were a comparatively minor preoccupation for the 1930s British film-maker.

In so far as *Before Hindsight* is about film-makers' own attitudes, we could have studied other periods and subjects, but there seemed good reasons why we should choose the rise of the dictators in the 30s. For a start, the audience can be relied upon to know the plot, so there was no need to give a history lesson. Secondly, the audience can reasonably be expected to have an attitude already to the material. Thus when Paramount reports in August 1933 on the huge swastika erected by the Nazis on a mountain overlooking Austria, they end the story with a sequence of happy girls in traditional dress dancing with armed SA brownshirts. The commentator's parting words are: 'Governments come and go but the picturesque life of this Alpine country has scarcely changed through the centuries.' Bearing in mind that the Nazi rise to power had been marked by continual acts of brutish violence reported in the newspapers

for over ten years, we cannot help but cringe at Paramount's myopia.

This cringing is a necessary prelude to asking whether the myopia was wilful, foolish or just plain ignorant. In other words, the weight of the war which we know was imminent forces us to examine closely the ways in which newsreel and film-makers worked. Burke said: 'There were Three Estates in Parliament; but in the Reporters' Gallery yonder there sat a Fourth Estate more important far than they all.' The almost total absence of a responsible 'fourth estate' in the British cinema between 1930 and 1939 is the more striking given that it was over this period that many of the techniques and styles of modern news and documentary film-making were pioneered: voice-over, commentary, interviewing, jump-cuts, combining faked sound with picture, the use of the zoom and many more. In fact, it was during the rise of the dictators that the cinema developed all the technical means necessary to discharge serious journalistic responsibilities. It was an era that saw the proliferation of the political use of film by left-wing, right-wing, militant and pacifist minority organisations, and the establishment of the great British documentary tradition. Consequently there is an

enormous amount of material to draw on. And yet there is comparatively little on the rise of the dictators, and most of what there is does not take a radical stand.

After the war, Gerald Sanger, then Editor of British Movietone News, wrote an article for *SIGHT AND SOUND* entitled 'Propaganda and the News-Reel'. In this he says that though editors 'should be very, very sure that they are right before they depart from the objective principle . . . there are occasions when an individual charged with a responsibility must flout what he knows will be popular opinion and preach an unwelcome gospel. That is what Mr. Churchill was doing in the 1930s, and it is a constant source of regret to me that we, who had the news-reel pictures of Nazi bellicosity, did not do more in those days to draw public attention to their significance.'

For confirmation of Sanger's view one only needs to look at the 30s newsreels themselves. As he suggests, it was not a problem of shots but of commentary. No matter how much you cut together dramatic shots of marching Nazis, they cannot themselves convey the secret machinations and ambitions of politicians. After all, the closest most film crews could get to the workings of power was the pavement outside No. 10 Downing Street, or Heston Aerodrome. As G. B. Shaw put it: 'All he knew about the international situation was innumerable items of the comings and goings of eminent gentlemen, so that now he was not Shaw but Bradshaw.'

Yet it is not right to dismiss the 30s newsreel as simply the fulfilment of the National Government's desire to propagate its appeasement policy to a gullible mass audience. For this argument to hold true we would have to turn a blind eye to some of the material and falsely to equate the newsreels with the newspapers in terms of their importance as sources of information. It

**Before Hindsight* is a documentary made by Elizabeth Taylor-Mead and Jonathan Lewis of Metropolis Pictures for the British Film Institute Production Board.

†See 'Film and the Workers' Movement in Britain, 1929-39' by Bert Hogenkamp, *SIGHT AND SOUND*, Spring 1976.

There is no reason to
suppose that the present
German action implies
a threat of hostilities.

BOYCOTT OF JEWS
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labelled and picketed
by Storm Troopers
British Movietone

STOP GERMAN
AGGRESSION
ACT TO SAVE
PEACE!

has always struck me as significant that in the 1938 opinion poll conducted by Mass-Observation: 'On what do you base your opinion about the danger of war?' newsreels are not even on the list of possibilities. It occurred to us during the making of *Before Hindsight* that in the resilience of newsreel footage to its exploitation as illustration of something it wasn't, lies its particular strength in portraying its own era. Furthermore, if the newsreels are examined alongside the documentaries of the period, it is possible to trace patterns of thought and style and to pick out problems which preoccupied film-makers regardless of their politics or who financed them.

It is important to realise that there was no rallying point for film-makers seeking to 'preach an unwelcome gospel'. There was little to bridge the gap between the National Government and the wilderness into which Churchill, Eden and Vansittart retreated. Attlee's Labour Party was opposed to rearmament and was no focus for any movement prepared to fight Hitler. Appeasement was the political expression of the pacifism which followed the revulsion felt by all at the grievous waste of lives in the Great War. Trust was placed in the power of the League of Nations and subsequently of Chamberlain to prevent the next war. The newsreels could hardly have been expected to go further than the politicians; and even films warning of the dangers and evils of Nazism were few and far between. Dissident views such as these are expressed on film if the makers have the resources, the opportunity and the will to do so. Given these three factors, the film must be allowed to reach its audience before it can be effective. This boils down to four issues: technology, access to the subject, editorial/directorial policy and censorship.

Technology

Some of the reasons why Roger Graef and Fred Wiseman can make revealing films about how people behave are that they use small crews, portable equipment, few lights and a lot of fast film. The technology hasn't just developed; it has changed



radically, and you can do things now which you couldn't begin to do then. Many people have given this as one reason why the newsreels failed to shoot the serious inside story. Crews had to lug about bulky cameras, yards of cable and huge microphones. They didn't like filming indoors, let alone up several flights of stairs. The optical sound camera occupied a lorry; one recordist told us that on one occasion he couldn't push it close enough to the camera so he left it on the other side of the road and dug up the tarmac to lay the cables across. The film stock needed a lot of light and

TOP: LEFT TO RIGHT. Title card from the Socialist Film Council's 'unofficial' newsreel; Gaumont-British cameramen filming in London; a cameraman from one of the left wing units; Gaumont-British news story of 1936, covering the militarisation of the Rhineland ('All eyes turned upon the British Cabinet,' says the commentator before this shot of Anthony Eden); Movietone item of April 1933—the last traceable newsreel reference to the persecution of the Jews until the refugee footage of 1938; Pathé news film of a 1938 Trafalgar Square rally in support of Czechoslovakia. Cover of a Movietone brochure of the 1930s



'March of Time': Hitler proclaims the Anschluss with Austria. Below: studio reconstruction for 'Inside Nazi Germany'



there was rarely the time or money to shoot much of it. The race to get the story back in time and ahead of the rivals was an ever-present burden.

Despite all this, the technological argument has never seemed to go very far in answering the charge. For a start, although portable equipment enabled CBS crews in Vietnam to film American soldiers burning civilian villages, the cameras thirty years before had not been so bulky as to prevent Universal's Norman Alley and Fox Movietone's Eric Mayell from filming on the deck of the US gunboat Panay as it was bombed by the Japanese. After all, silent cameras were small enough to be smuggled under coats into Cup Finals to scoop competitors. Ivor Montagu in *Prisoners Prove Intervention in Spain* (1937) was able to get shots of a crashed German war plane and to film and record the evidence of German and Italian airmen, which directly contradicted what their Governments were saying. He allowed the prisoners to see the camera but did not tell them he was recording sound; the microphone and cables cannot have been too bulky to hide.

Access to the subject

A huge factor was that from 1933 onwards all film coming out of Germany was filmed for propaganda purposes under the control of Dr. Goebbels. Foreign crews weren't allowed to fly in and film whatever they wanted. Even if they had been allowed, they had neither the time nor the money. The newsreels relied on what they were sent. Through its membership of the Fox chain Movietone had an office in Munich, but that was supplied with footage from

Bruno Stindt, Hitler's favourite cameraman. The shots in March of Time's *Inside Nazi Germany* of informers, people in prison and Jewish scientists being shut out from their laboratories were all filmed in studios in America. The equipment problem did affect access in that the newsreels tended to have to rely on officialdom for facilities to such an extent that the fine line between dependence and subservience soon became blurred. This was exacerbated by the rivalries between companies, since although the others might 'steal' the Test Match from the one who had bought the rights, they seem to have behaved with greater decorum in filming politicians.

Thus Chamberlain granted Paramount the exclusive rights to filming his speech to the Foreign Press Association in December 1938, while Movietone had its exclusive speech of Mussolini in 1931 proclaiming his epic policy of World Peace. The granting by great men of the privilege of filming them seems to have pre-empted the possibility that they might be asked an embarrassing question. In any case, the newsreel crews did not see themselves as journalists, but as working primarily in the entertainment business. Since they rarely went out with a director, and researchers were unheard of, it is difficult to know if a crew would have known what to ask even if they had had the inclination. What generally happened was that the great man was filmed making a speech to camera; only rarely is there somebody asking questions, and then they are never belligerent ones.

Editorial policy

The policy of the newsreels was twofold: to entertain and to inform. They were a commercial operation, acutely dependent on the continuance of their contracts with the exhibitors, which in turn depended on the happiness of cinemagoers. It must be remembered that most people went to the cinema to see a full programme consisting of a main film, a supporting film, cartoons, trailers, often live music from an organist, as well as the newsreel. Of course, newsreels were shown in newsreel theatres, on television and even, briefly, in trains, but since there were only two issues from each company each week little of the content could be fully up to date. Thus the newsreels were in no sense a real precursor of *News at Ten*, and there is no use in accusing them of failure to be. Their political material was greatly outweighed by footage of sports, Royalty, children, animals, catastrophes, hat fashions and comic sketches. In our researches we found only about 1,000 items which concerned aspects of Anglo-German political relationships between 1930 and 1939. Considering that there were five newsreels putting out two editions a week with between, say, eight and twelve items in each edition, this represents only about one-fiftieth of the total. Nor is it fair to regard a newsreel as having the same kind of influence as a newspaper. Perhaps BBC's *Nationwide* is the closest parallel, and one doesn't watch that to find out what is happening in Chile or South Africa.

Despite these considerations, there are discernible editorial attitudes. They seem to follow almost invariably the official Government line, as did most of the con-

temporary newspapers. The attitudes most commonly adopted were as follows: 'We fought the Great War as a war to end wars. Can we betray the trust of the fallen by fighting again?'; 'The Prime Minister is always right'; 'Germany got a raw deal at Versailles, she's only trying to get back what is due to her' and, as the period wore on, 'We would do well to build up our armed services.' Mussolini was frequently made fun of, as in the 1936 Movietone story about his moving flocks of sheep and goats to fresh pastures in Ethiopia: 'So in addition to the sheep, which we always knew followed their leader, Italian goats will now bleat for Mussolini.' Hitler inspired a kind of helplessness, worried awe typified by these remarks from Pathé: 'This is the hour of his triumph, the hour when his dream of annexing Austria is realised. Whether that realisation will become a calamity or not depends only on him.' Occasionally they put their foot in it badly, as when G. B. Shaw was called upon by Paramount to reassure their audience about conscription in Germany. 'You may take it from me that the news from Germany is the very best news that we have had since the war . . . don't be frightened of the Germans.'

Where did these attitudes come from? In many cases they were, or purported to be, simply reflections of popular beliefs, although they are by no means a representative cross-section. One looks in vain for the kind of cynicism Low was expressing in his cartoons, or the urgent warnings which Churchill, Vansittart and Eden were issuing.

The ownership of the newsreel companies was in the hands of the Establishment. As George Elvin wrote in the *Cine-Technician* (Jan.-Feb. 1939): 'The majority of their executives are Government supporters and their newsreels naturally tend to reflect that fact. (The honours lists are beginning to reflect it too.)' There was also a powerful pro-Germany clique in England in the 30s whose representatives were to be seen at Lady Astor's week-end parties: Rothermere, Lothian and Londonderry. As early as March 15th 1935, William Shirer could write in his diary: 'Goering has told the *Daily Mail*, which through Lord Rothermere, its owner, and Ward Price, its roving correspondent, has become a wonderful Nazi sounding board, that Germany is building up a military air force.' Rothermere also owned British Movietone News in partnership with Twentieth Century-Fox, so it is not surprising that when Germany stormed out of the League of Nations in 1933 because she was denied equality of armaments with the great powers, Movietone used Ward Price to interview Goebbels.

Perhaps 'interview' is the wrong word. What you are shown is the journalist making the following statement to Dr. Goebbels: 'I understand your Excellency to say that Germany took part in the negotiations of the disarmament conference only under the special conditions that Germany should receive equal consideration and equal rights. You consider that the German Government as a self-respecting regime has no other course open to it except that of retiring from the League of Nations.' End of interview. It is surely inconceivable now that a television company would send a journalist to cover, say, Ian Smith's departure from the Geneva talks on Rhodesia and only

transmit a sequence in which the reporter simply stated Mr. Smith's opinions to Mr. Smith without any comment from Mr. Smith. Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised. At a press conference in Saigon during the Ngo Dinh Diem regime, a senior US military officer was asked an embarrassing question by an American newsmen. He snapped back at the offending reporter 'Why the hell don't you get on the team?' Ward Price was simply playing 'on the team'.

The newsreels were so often flippant, misinformed and biased in their coverage of Anglo-German political relations that it is impossible to believe that a coherent editorial policy existed at all. Their essentially Tory line was generally expressed through a jaunty brand of optimistic chauvinism. A good example is Movietone asking Lord Runciman, on his return from Prague, about the Czech situation:

COMMENTATOR: 'His reply is, to say the least of it, cautious.'

RUNCIMAN: 'I wish I knew anything, as much as you do.'

COMMENTATOR: 'Oh we can't accept that, Lord Runciman. Will you be going back to Prague?'

RUNCIMAN: 'That's in the lap of the gods.'

The commentator is not actually asking Lord Runciman these questions in person; Runciman is at Croydon Airport clutching a travelling rug and looking very worried, while the commentator is in the Movietone dubbing theatre adding his questions afterwards. He would never have dared speak like that to Runciman in person. And why didn't he want to accept Runciman's view? It was the truth, but the truth wasn't as optimistic as Chamberlain's version of it when he landed at Heston. Movietone was 'on the team' throughout Munich.

Take another example. Gaumont-British News, covering the 1936 militarisation of the Rhineland, reported Flandin's refusal to negotiate with Germany as long as there were troops on the Rhine: 'Then the eyes of the world turned upon the British Cabinet,' said the commentator, and some very stirring martial music was played over two shots of Eden walking in opposite directions with this quotation superimposed: 'There is no reason to suppose that the present German action implies a threat of hostilities.' This is followed by the commentator saying that Britain will give careful consideration to Germany's proposal for a twenty-five year peace pact in Europe. Now, as Britain was pledged under the terms of the Locarno Pact to support France, and France was refusing to talk to

Germany, we might expect Gaumont-British at least to mention, if not stress, our obligation to France. After all, what is the point of considering signing a new pact with an old enemy in breach of the Treaty of Versailles if you have shown yourself unwilling to stand by the terms of an existing pact with an existing ally? Gaumont-British got round all this by ignoring the Locarno Pact, just as the Government did.

One of the better examples of a newsreel's wilful myopia is Pathé's coverage of two London rallies. The first is the Hyde Park meeting in September 1934 in which Mosley's Blackshirts clashed with the Left. Since our discovery of the Film and Photo League archive we now have a unique opportunity to compare commercial and left-wing coverage of the same event. Pathé shot the whole event on a wide lens high up on a building overlooking the park. All one can see is milling crowds in the distance. The commentator makes no mention of who is rallying for what, but simply states that peace was preserved 'by the tact and restraint of the London policemen and the good nature and reason of the man in the street.' The FPL Workers' Newsreel, however, shows that it was a fairly violent clash, with the Blackshirts using knuckledusters against hecklers. They had taken their cameras into the park among the demonstrators, and they stated quite clearly on title cards (all the FPL material is silent) exactly who was fighting whom. This is not to say, of course, that they refrained from editorial attitude: preceding a shot of a marching column of black-shirted girls is the caption: 'The Fascist fiasco'.

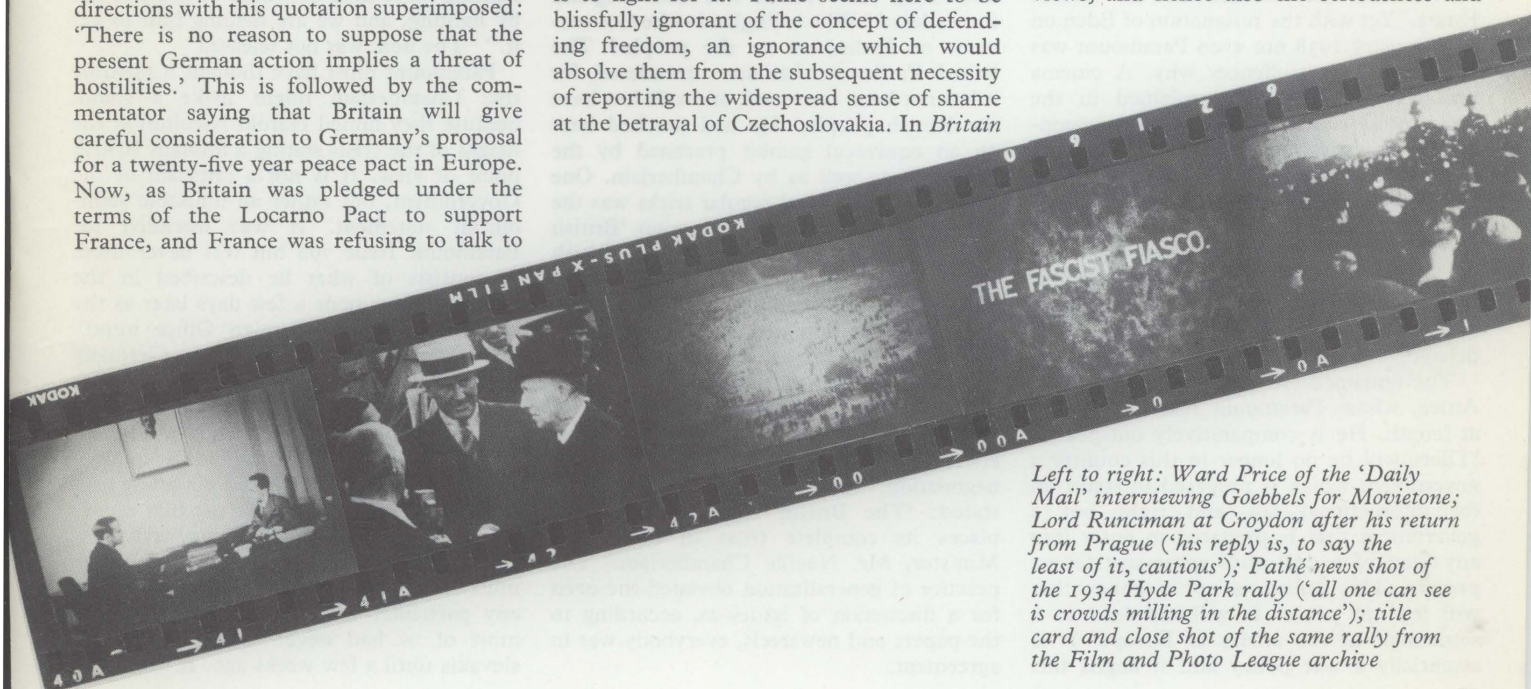
By the time Pathé covered the pro-Czechoslovakia rally in Trafalgar Square just prior to Chamberlain's Godesberg trip in September 1938, they had learnt to extract an aloof kind of humour from the views of others. Against shots of slogans saying 'Stop German Aggression, Act to Save Peace', 'Stand by Czechoslovakia Against German Fascist Aggression', 'For Peace Stop Hitler', the commentator pronounced: 'It's a meeting for peace, but strangely enough from some of the slogans you'd think that the way to ensure peace is to fight for it.' Pathé seems here to be blissfully ignorant of the concept of defending freedom, an ignorance which would absolve them from the subsequent necessity of reporting the widespread sense of shame at the betrayal of Czechoslovakia. In *Britain*

by *Mass-Observation* it is recorded that 'When the first newsreels were shown of the Chamberlain-Hitler tea party observers recorded that Chamberlain was cheered and Hitler hissed. A few days later, Hitler was still getting his hisses, but Chamberlain was received in silence.'

Examples of trivialisation abound: Universal's 1937 story about the 'Children's dreamland comes true—toy soldiers in Germany'; Paramount's interview with Hitler's nephew: 'Don't be kidded by my moustache, my heart is in the right place and that's the main thing'; and Pathé's wondrously benign story eight months before the outbreak of war on Chamberlain's visit to the Pope, 'who fully approves his appeasement policy', and then to the opera with Mussolini.

It is vain to look for great differences in policy between the newsreel companies. Gaumont-British perhaps is marked by a particularly jolly patriotism, while Paramount was certainly the most outspoken. Differences were bound to be marginal, not only because of their managements' conservatism, but also because they all drew on the same Goebbels/UFA sources in Germany, and towards the end of the 30s they even started to pool national material. There were complex financial tie-ups between the companies, which *The Factual Film* described in 1947: 'Gaumont-British and Twentieth Century-Fox are related through the Metropolitan and Bradford Trust which gives Movietone an entry into some of the Gaumont-British cinemas. The late Mr. Maxwell, who owned Pathé, also had shares in Gaumont . . .'

Interestingly enough, following the Government line didn't always mean taking a soft line. There is a fascinating Paramount story at the beginning of 1937 which takes Hitler and his demands very seriously. The surprisingly hard line is explained by the fact that the item concerns Germany's desire to regain her 'lost' colonies. This was an issue on which Britain had something concrete to lose, as some had passed into the Empire after Versailles. Hence Leo Amery and Archibald Sinclair's adamant refusals of Hitler's demands in their interviews, and hence also the seriousness and



Left to right: Ward Price of the 'Daily Mail' interviewing Goebbels for Movietone; Lord Runciman at Croydon after his return from Prague ('his reply is, to say the least of it, cautious'); Pathé news shot of the 1934 Hyde Park rally ('all one can see is crowds milling in the distance'); title card and close shot of the same rally from the Film and Photo League archive

intelligence of Paramount's commentary. The newsreels could obviously do it if they wanted to. This was a rare case where the Government line had the effect of elevating the journalistic tone of an item. Furthermore, there were attempts made, particularly by Paramount, to apply these higher standards to stories which tried to 'preach an unwelcome gospel'. As they were all suppressed they come under the next heading.

Censorship

The newsreels were exempt from censorship by the British Board of Film Censors, and the companies were careful not to betray the trust thus placed in them. The release of Shanghai war footage by Paramount caused Jeffrey Bernerd, the Gaumont-British chief, to express this trust in terms which suggested commercial implications: 'It is the duty of the newsreels to present news but not to put on the screen material for a political purpose . . . We as a newsreel have a certain trust with the exhibitor, and that is to offer a film that would meet with his approval if he saw it before he booked it.' The debate as to whether it was *right* for newsreels to show shocking material was in reality closely bound up with the question 'Will the exhibitor cancel his contract with me if his audiences complain?'

Writing in the *Cine-Technician* (March-April, 1939), J. Neill-Brown suggested that some news theatre managers were in the habit of 'making up their own reels from bits and pieces of others, taking good care to include only the sections that are likely to give no offence to any section of the audience.' Their general policy was 'to do nothing to antagonise the Government in power, in case it should bring a stringent censorship to bear on newsreels which at the moment do not have to be submitted to the censor.'

Thomas Cummins, Paramount's Editor, was unique among newsreel chiefs in the 30s in attempting to practise the theory that the newsreels should maintain an independent voice: 'The newsreel deserves the position which it CAN achieve of being a worthy screen representative of the Fourth Estate.' Yet with the resignation of Eden on 20 February 1938 not even Paramount was able to tell its audiences why. A cinema manager in Cheshire complained in the trade press about the 'bald and unconvincing narrative' which passed for explanation. 'This "hush hush" reporting,' he went on, 'was true of all but one firm, which was so "indiscreet" as to allow a prominent critic of the Government to speak his views to the camera. Within a couple of hours of delivery of this reel to the exhibitors, urgent orders were issued that the item must be deleted.'

The unnamed critic was in fact Clement Attlee, whom Paramount had interviewed at length. He is comparatively outspoken: 'There will be no longer in this country a government which is prepared to stand up for international law and right but a government that is prepared to enter into any kind of a deal with aggressive fascist powers. This policy is not a policy that will lead to peace. It will not lead to a settlement of the affairs of Europe. It is essentially a war policy and it aligns this

country with the reactionary forces of the world.' Not surprisingly, Mass-Observation found that two-thirds of the people they polled, when asked 'What does Eden's resignation mean?' could not answer the question. In our search to discover who the cinema manager was referring to, we found two words on the relevant contents sheet in the Movietone Library: 'Eden Interview'. They have been crossed out several times, and someone has written 'NO FILM, NO FILM' against it. It is possible that Paramount was not unique.

At the time of the Munich crisis, Paramount was again the only company that tried to put out an anti-Government piece. They had interviewed three critics of Chamberlain's policy over Czechoslovakia on the day of his second flight to see Hitler. The Government learnt about this, contacted the US Ambassador Joseph Kennedy, who told Paramount in America, who instructed their London operation to cut the material out. Up and down the country telegrams were received by cinema managers saying: 'Please delete Wickham Steed and A. J. Cummings subjects from today's Paramount news; we have been officially requested to do so.' This caused a storm in the cinema press, questions were asked in the House of Commons. Chamberlain at first denied that the Government or Kennedy had anything to do with it, but finally allowed that 'The attention of the American Ambassador was drawn to certain items. He was asked to look into it.' In the controversy that this action caused, it transpired further that the BBFC had held up four issues of *March of Time* between 1936 and 1938. Their film on the Czech crisis, *Britain's Dilemma*, was never shown in Britain at all. In 1936 an Association of Cine-Technicians resolution had pinpointed one of the most disagreeable aspects of censorship: 'The underlying assumption that British audiences are incapable of witnessing material with which they disagree without riot is, further, an insult to the British people which, as citizens, the Council [of the A.C.T.] must strongly repudiate.'

What was it Wickham Steed, ex-Editor of *The Times*, had said? One of his most interesting observations was 'Has England surrendered? Who is England—the Government or Parliament or the people? The British Parliament has not surrendered, for it has not been convened, and still less have the British people.' He had touched here on an equivocal gambit practised by the newsreels as well as by Chamberlain. One of the commentators' regular tricks was the meaningless use of the expression 'British people'. Thus 'the mood of the British people is firm and steady' . . . 'the British people stand fast behind their leader,' etc. This was not confined to the newsreels. The *Daily Herald* on 12 September 1938 wrote: 'The British nation is completely united. They see no shadow of reason for anything but a frank and complete acceptance of the last Czech offer as a basis for negotiation.' On the 19th, the *Daily Mail* stated: 'The British nation unreservedly places its complete trust in the Prime Minister, Mr. Neville Chamberlain.' The practice of generalisation obviated the need for a discussion of issues as, according to the papers and newsreels, everybody was in agreement.

The *vox populi* interview served the same purpose. Paramount helped its audience come to terms with the need for conscription by filming one-line statements from willing recruits: the student, the delivery boy, the butcher's boy and the unemployed. There is something disturbingly phoney about their unanimous readiness to join up. This was not a technique limited to the newsreels. In 1936 Paul Rotha had done the same thing in *The Peace of Britain* for exactly the opposite purpose: persuading the audience to have nothing whatsoever to do with military activity. In fact, as the results of Mass-Observation's polls show, the country was deeply split by Munich, and the proportions of the split varied hour by hour. What was particularly irresponsible was the total failure to report the deep sense of confusion among many people; the nagging feeling that something was going badly wrong at the top could not be assuaged by the jaunty optimism of the Fourth Estate.

It wasn't until Ivan Scott left Movietone to edit his *Point of View* series that the debate of vital issues on film took place in commercial cinemas. Scott's format was a scripted discussion between Mr. Pro and Mr. Con; his first subject was titled *Guns and Butter*, which ran at the Leicester Square Odeon as a supporting short. Unfortunately none of the series survives, but they seem to have fulfilled the need to know the opposite view, a practice which in its developed form is blamed now for much bland television.

Wickham Steed had a second chance to present his opposing views when Paramount filmed him appropriately at a Foyle's literary luncheon on the freedom of the press. He tried again: 'Here I am in this terrible glare, which reminds me that not so very long ago I too was filmed by the Paramount Newsreel at their request. I made a few remarks which I thought apposite to the occasion—not all of them appeared in the version of the film which was shown, but one remark did appear and was promptly suppressed. It was this; I hope it will not lead to the suppression of this film if one is being taken . . . "Does Hitler want war?" "Oh no! He only wants to get without fighting more than he would be likely to get by fighting, and we are helping him to get it." ' The item was not released.

Paramount must have thought it possible that Chamberlain might make a stand, because they filmed Harold Nicolson at the height of the crisis stating a militant British point of view. It is not a criticism of the Government, but rather an unusable semi-official statement. It was intended for Paramount Issue 792 but was never used. It consists of what he described in the House of Commons a few days later as the expression of the 'Foreign Office mind'. 'What Great Britain has said to Germany is this. We're perfectly ready to help you as much as we can to get back your Germans, your Sudeten Germans into your own Reich. We think that on the whole is quite a reasonable thing, but we will not allow you, under any circumstances, to use that excuse in order to destroy the independence of a small country and a small republic. You must realise that it is not that we have got any particular interest in Czechoslovakia; most of us had never heard of Czechoslovakia until a few weeks ago. It is that we

have an interest, a very great interest, and we will always have an interest, in preventing violence triumphing over law. You're trying to do something to a little state by actual violence. We're offering you a very reasonable way out of the difficulty and if you refuse to accept that way, and if you resort to force we will meet you with force; that is what we said. And Herr Hitler says, "But you cannot really mean that", and we answered "Yes, we do." What is particularly important about this piece of film is that it is almost unique in the period in suggesting that Britain was prepared to fight the Germans. The fact that it was never released and that the pre-condition for its use was a stance by Chamberlain which he had no intention of taking makes it all the more poignant.

As I mentioned earlier, looking at the newsreels alongside the documentaries provides some unexpected insights. The most important one is that, apart from Ivor Montagu's *Free Thaelmann* (1935), we have been unable to find any British non-fiction film of the 30s which advocated anything resembling armed intervention in the affairs of Germany, which existing treaty obligations could have justified. The newsreels, which were reviled by the Grierson group, Socialist Film Council, left-wing A.C.T. membership, Film and Photo League, etc. did at least cover events in Germany. Even for this they came under critical fire.

George Elvin wrote in the *Cine-Technician* (Jan.-Feb. 1939): 'And if the newsreel companies follow the lead given by the British Board of Film Censors and are afraid of disturbances, why their continued shots of Hitler and Mussolini? Seldom do I see a newsreel featuring either of these two dictators but someone or other in the audience gives them "the bird".' Kenneth Gordon amplified this in the next issue: 'One thing the tax on negative from foreign sources may do is to remove the persistent pictures of Hitler and Mussolini that have continually flaunted themselves from the screen to the annoyance of democratic British cinema audiences.' It is interesting that both men, trade union and Labour Party members, seem bothered by the frequent coverage of the dictators. Also the commentaries do not seem to have been powerful enough to hoodwink the audiences into viewing the dictators with equanimity. An Odeon poll of 150,000 children in 142 cinemas on 2 November 1938 revealed that 88 per cent of them disliked the foreign dictators and that 53 per cent booed them. At least there were shots of them to boo at.

Why did the 30s documentaries seem to steer clear of Germany and related questions such as racial persecution? Certainly the situation *vis-à-vis* Spain was completely different. The preponderance of films about Spain has a good deal to do with the fact that although the Civil War was a complex issue, the emotive force of the Republican cause and the wholehearted support of the Communist Party enabled many to make up their minds. The work of Montagu, Cole, Bond, Dickinson and others bears witness to this. Furthermore, there was actually something to be filmed in Spain. The translation of political sympathy into military action provided material for the film-makers. In

Germany there was no free access; the issues were complicated, and the Germans' preparations for foreign visitors were invariably discreet. A *Behind the German Lines* would have been impossible, but there are other reasons why Germany was comparatively ignored.

The Grierson group kept firmly out of politics. As George Elvin said: 'John Grierson recently had to cut from one of his films (in this case at the instigation of the censor) a speech about the Tolpuddle Martyrs and the right to unionise. It was interpreted as a special plea for the Labour Party, and John Grierson said that as a strictly non-party maker of films he could not risk an accusation of that sort. The German film industry has decayed largely through the operation of such a one-track mind. The British industry will follow in the same way if this sort of attitude continues.'

The Film and Photo League were almost totally preoccupied with abolishing the Means Test, and with the problems of poverty, unemployment, distressed areas and the need for trade union organisation. That they were also concerned with events abroad is shown by a fascinating document we found inside the lid of one of their cans. Not having the dubious advantage of being on Dr. Goebbels' mailing list, they saved up the money to buy two of Eugene Castle's 16mm silent newsreels made for the



May 1939: RAF recruiting trailer which was attached to a Movietone newsreel

amateur market. They then wrote a commentary for each story for the projectionist to read out to the audience. This is what they wrote to cover one sequence: 'MUSSOLINI VISITS HITLER, or why girls leave home. The fascist dictators stage their theatrical meeting amid the flashlights of the press cameras. What a façade to conceal the shortage of food and the steady lowering of the standard of life, and the fact that these two capitalisms can now exist only by borrowing from London and by preparing for war.'

The most striking thing about the Socialist Film Council's work is that their newsreel, which they intended to show what the commercial reels were leaving out, in fact looks exactly like a commercial newsreel. What unites their work with that of the FPL and the Peace Pledge Union is a strong vein of pacifism, which was the result of a revulsion at the horrors of the First World War combined with an earnest left-wing plea for international peace and brotherhood.

Ivor Montagu's *Free Thaelmann* stands out in its concern for the Communist Party leader jailed by the Nazis, while his *Peace and Plenty* is certainly the most eloquent

criticism of Chamberlain and the National Government during the period. *Free Thaelmann* is the only case on record of material being smuggled out of Germany, to be cut into a film in England. Dupe negatives went to France and America also and different versions were edited in each country. It is an extremely powerful film but it fails to tell its audience what to do with their mobilised enthusiasm. *Peace and Plenty* (1939) is primarily an attack on Chamberlain's appalling record on such matters as slum clearance and unemployment. The film also hammers the Government for its inadequate protection of the civilian population against bombing, but by then even Movietone was openly critical on this issue. One gets the impression that the indictment of Chamberlain for his 'friendship' with Hitler and Mussolini is partly a stick to beat him with over his domestic policy.

In the Co-Op film *Advance Democracy* (1938), we found one of the strongest anti-Hitler statements in a 30s film. It was made by A. V. Alexander in a radio broadcast staged by the film to convert its central character to the Co-Op cause. Alexander identifies Nazi brutality and racial persecution as a threat to world freedom and states that the Co-Op movement is fully prepared to defend that freedom. It should be stressed, however, that conversion to the cause is the aim of the film; Alexander's expression of militant resistance to fascism is primarily a rallying point. These films are the exception, not the rule. As the phoney war was to indicate, the British people were unready both psychologically and practically; and the cinema trailed behind public opinion.

The one incontrovertible evil perpetrated by the Nazis which, contrary to post-war rumour, was widely known throughout the world before the war, was the persecution of the Jews. *March of Time* covered it, the British documentaries seem to have ignored it, while there is an apparent gap in the newsreel libraries between Movietone's 1933 item on the closure of Jewish shops and the stories of refugees arriving from Germany at the end of 1938. The only references apart from these occur in the intermittent coverage of Jewish rallies in London. The commercial cinema never used its resources to mobilise public opinion. Sir Michael Bruce, Odeon's publicity chief, had gone to Germany in 1938. He brought back a report: 'The atrocities in the concentration camps are almost incredible . . . After tomorrow the entire means of livelihood for the Jews in Germany will cease; Jews will not be allowed to work under any circumstances or carry on shops or businesses. As soon as they can no longer exist they will be forced into the streets and collected into concentration camps . . . The rack, the thumbscrew and the "Maiden" exhibited in the Nuremberg museum have been brought into use again.'

Today's Cinema adds the following remark: 'The cinema trade's answer must be through the medium of the great drive for the refugees, the trade's response to which up to date has been extraordinarily fine.' They used their fund-raising skills but not their cameras or their screens. It is not, all in all, a record of which anybody in the industry can be proud. ■

'Violence is going to escalate because the public always demands more than they saw last time.'—Roger Corman, quoted in the *Sun*.

'The traditional appeal of violence in the popular arts has to do with excitement and shock. To witness the cruelty of villains arousing reciprocal action, to see the power of recovery of brutalised victims, to trace the protracted pattern of stress, is certainly a form of pleasure.'—Lawrence Alloway: *Violent America: The Movies 1946-64*.

'In Provo, Utah, where Gary Gilmore is due to be shot on Monday, a local television station, so incensed at not being allowed to film the event, have said they will hire a helicopter and film the execution from the air. As capital punishment becomes show-business, some condemned men have said they would like their executions shown on prime-time television—a view supported by such notable public figures as former Texas governor John Connally.'—*Daily Mail*, January 15, 1977.



'Marathon Man':
'Lord Olivier
performed the
dentist-chair
tortures on
Dustin Hoffman'

VIOLENCE

David Robinson

It was pure coincidence that *Death Weekend* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* were shown to the London critics on the same day; but the fact produced a dreadful alarm in those gentle souls. They looked around them and it seemed that the movies had suddenly descended into a new barbaric age, where mindless violence ruled. In fact, of course, there was nothing very sudden about it. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* was already two years old and had had its fling as a cult movie in the United States before it came to Britain. In America, too, the 'snuff movie' craze—in the end it seems in fact to have been a rumour rather than a craze—had come and gone. The nature and the quality of the violence in *Death Weekend* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* had direct antecedents which could be traced back at least to the start of the decade. Even so, the full force of the blow did seem to fall on London all at once. In the twelve months of 1976, the critics were shown at least three dozen films which included scenes of extreme and graphic horror or brutality. The titles included *Death Race 2000*, *House of Mortal Sin*, *To the Devil a Daughter*, *The Antichrist*, *Savage Man—Savage Beast*, *Vigilante Force*, *The 'Human' Factor*, *Tenderness of the Wolves*, *Lipstick*, *The Omen*, *Squirm*, *Taxi Driver*, *Drum*, *The Last Woman*, *Return of a Man Called Horse*, *Marathon Man*, *Schizo*, *Survival*, *Carrie*.

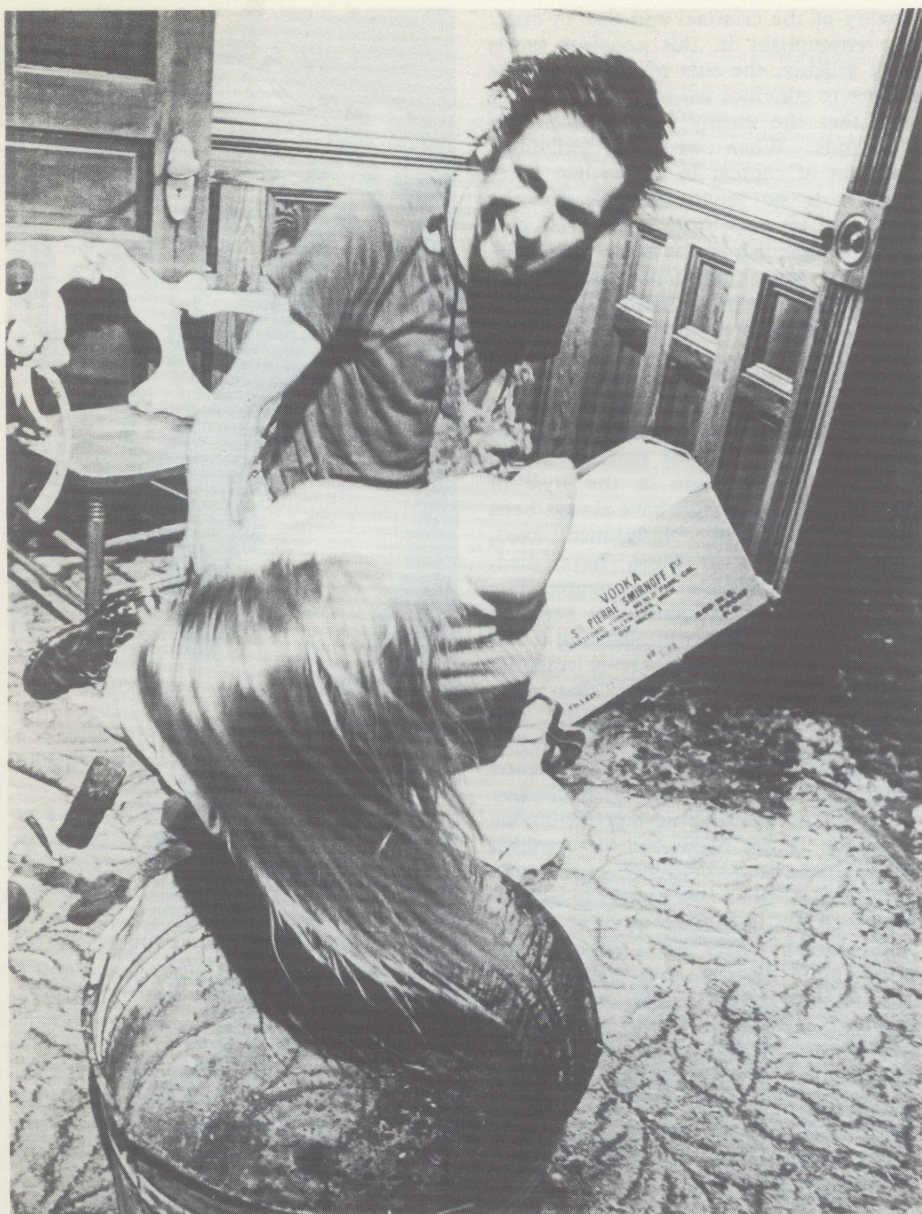
As the list indicates, the new savagery was by no means confined to crude exploitation films; even *Death Weekend* was made with the assistance of the Canadian Film Development Corporation. In *Marathon Man* Lord Olivier, no less, performed the dentist-chair tortures on Dustin Hoffman. In *The Omen* Gregory Peck plunged a fork deep into the face of Billie Whitelaw, David Warner was decapitated by a flying sheet of glass, and Lee Remick persistently fell from great heights on to concrete. *Lipstick* involved a brutal rape, with buggery, and a ritualistic revenge scene in which the violated heroine pumped bullets into the

rapist's genitals. The British Board of Film Censors spared audiences a scene in *The Return of a Man Called Horse* in which Richard Harris lit a fire on the privates of one of his enemies.

Moving into the 1977 releases, the critics were not desired to see *Grizzly*, which was advertised on London marquees as '18 feet of Gut Crunching Fury'. *Two Minute Warning* teased the audience with a 100-minute wait until the psychopathic sniper began picking off individuals in the ball-game crowd, splattering their gore over the bystanders. This was topped off with the terror of an audience stampede. Sam

Peckinpah's *Cross of Iron* was the advance guard of a new cycle of war films. Among the disasters of war depicted in vivid terms was a corpse ground into the mud by the wheels of passing lorries, and a soldier (having unwisely offered it as a hostage to fortune) having his penis bitten off by a Russian lady. (Emasculation was much in vogue through 1976: cf. *The Last Woman* and Oshima's *Empire of the Senses*.)

Pure exploitation pictures still stayed a step ahead. Even a modest British production of 1976, Pete Walker's *Schizo*, offered a psychopathic killer, a woman bludgeoned to death with a weight-lifter's hammer, another killed by a knitting needle plunged into her neck, and broken glass as an offensive weapon. The BBFC found it necessary to cut a mere three seconds out of this film, but cuts in imported films of violence, in order to make them qualify even for the 'X' certificate, can sometimes amount to entire reels. To judge from the BBFC's Monthly Reports, the biggest problems are presented by films originating in the United States, Hong Kong, Italy and, increasingly, Greece. The BBFC cut 13 minutes 27½ seconds from the Italian film *Sex Life in a Women's Prison*, largely on account of brutality; and 7½ minutes from a *kung fu* import from Hong Kong, *The Death of Bruce Lee*, which introduced a new weapon, a kind of inverted knuckleduster for the gouging of eyes. An Italian film, *Sexorcist*, concerned violence based on crucifixions. *The Curse of the Black Cat* required the reduction of a realistic scene of



a girl's breasts being slashed with a razor. A Greek production, *Devils on Mykonos*, was submitted with a scene in which a man was burnt to death with a flaming aerosol; and another in which a scythe, plunged into a girl's back, re-emerged from between

her breasts. Even a Swedish picture, *Dirty Fingers*, included as a weapon a glove studded with razor blades.

This list, too, leaves out of account the (comparatively few) films which the BBFC rejects entirely—films which no amount of



Violence and women. Left: 'The Texas Chain Saw Massacre'. Below: Margaux Hemingway in 'Lipstick'

cutting would qualify for their certification. Two films recently refused certificates are particularly interesting as representing extreme examples of current key types of violent themes.

The action of the Japanese film *Violated Angels* is set in a nurses' home. (Nurses, like nuns, have a specially piquant sexual-sadist attraction.) Two of the nurses make love before an audience of some others, who then introduce a man found on the beach. The newcomer suddenly shoots one of the girls, threatens the others, and shoots a second girl by inserting a pistol into her vagina. A third girl is killed by slashes from a razor as she is tied to a post. A fourth is shot as she is made to look at the mutilated body. The man then copulates with the surviving nurse and the image bursts from black and white into colour. An epilogue of actuality shots of soldiers in action apparently invites you, albeit unconvincingly, to place some sort of philosophical interpretation upon the affair.

Late Night Trains is an Italian/West German production, and less exotic—indeed determinedly realistic—in its action. Two schoolgirls returning home for Christmas on a late night train are cornered in their compartment by two young thugs and an older woman, who encourages the men, for her own excitement, to humiliate and sexually assault the girls. The first is repeatedly raped at knife-point. A respectable middle-aged passenger passing the compartment, instead of offering assistance, becomes a voyeur, is discovered and invited to join in the fun. The second girl is deflowered with a knife and bleeds to death. Nearly naked, her friend escapes, runs down the train and locks herself in a lavatory. When the two men start to break down the door, she leaps from the window to her death. The other body is thrown out after her.

This action has been intercut with scenes of the father of one of the girls, a well-to-do doctor, holding forth at a dinner party about his theories on the humane treatment of criminals. From the dinner party he goes to the station to meet the girls, who of course are not on the train. He offers help to one of the rapists, who has been cut. While he is treating him, he learns from the radio what has happened, and that this is one of the guilty men. All his humane principles abandoned, he takes revenge by means of the violence he had earlier deplored.

The BBFC considered the film dangerous and unacceptable as public entertainment. In particular they were concerned about the placing of the camera and the use of the voyeur character to engage the audience in a parallel voyeurist participation in the events shown.

Both films exemplify the emphasis in many of the recent spate of films of extreme violence upon sexual assault and the degradation of women. The BBFC was stirred to note in its March 1976 Monthly Report that *Violated Angels* was only one of seven films that month to include rape—a subject for which there seems to be a growing fashion in many parts of the world.' Chris

Pettit shrewdly pointed out in *Time Out* that following the Second World War there was a kind of parallel: 'The Hollywood woman-in-jeopardy cycle reached a peak . . . The overseas forces returned home to discover that during their absence women, by necessity, had achieved greater social, economic and sexual freedom. The immediate need was to rehabilitate women back into the home. Hollywood's post-war cultural propaganda was therefore predictably misogynist. Movie heroines, when not subjected to actual physical handicaps, were under psychological pressure. The message was plain, as Marjorie Rosen has noted in *Popcorn Venus*: "Men were arbiters of women's sanity—or insanity". Perhaps the insistent submission of women in films of the 70s to humiliation, degradation and sexual violence is the price that is being vicariously exacted for the liberation movement.

This certainly seems to be the specific message of *Death Weekend*. In the opening scenes the heroine is shown asserting her domination over the weak and sexually mal-adjusted male (a voyeur who takes women to his home and then photographs them through one-way mirrors). Symbolically, she takes the wheel of his powerful sports car and shows herself the more reckless driver. It is while showing off her prowess that she arouses the fury of four moronic thugs, by driving them off the road. They demand revenge. Entering the man's house, they smash up his most treasured possessions, vomit over the furniture and finally kill him. Then the promise of the disreputable but apparently effectively inviting advertising campaign is fulfilled: 'They were going to rape her . . . one by one. She was going to kill them . . . one by one.' In case the male chauvinist point is not entirely apparent, at the end of the film, after the girl has devised terrible deaths for her four tormentors, in a quick series of flashback shots the leader of the gang—the only good-looking and bright member of the group—suddenly appears to her eyes as sexually desirable. She is, in other words, clearly shown to have *desired* the rape which she has herself frustrated.

At the same time, both *Death Weekend* and *Late Night Trains* exemplify a narrative type which has been dominant at least since Michael Winner's *Death Wish*, the 'revenge' film with its important sub-category, the 'vigilante' film. The story form itself is as old as the hills: the classic Western plot regularly relied on establishing cause in the form of a crime committed by the villain, and effect in the subsequent retribution exacted by the hero. It is the altered emphasis which turns the 'retribution' theme into the 'revenge' theme. The opening scene of *Death Wish*, the terrorist atrocities in *The 'Human' Factor*, or the assaults of *Death Weekend* are built up to a pitch which demands a revenge as terrible.

'While good may still triumph,' writes Ralph Berets,* with reference to a rather earlier and milder group of violence films, 'it hardly does so in honourable ways. If we look at a film like *Dirty Harry*, we discover that the side of law and order is as corrupt and dishonourable as the sick

mentality of the criminal and that in order to be triumphant in this constant battle against villainy, the side of justice (so the film tries to convince us) must resort to the means that the enemy himself uses and understands. When we take individual scenes out of context in a film like *Dirty Harry*, it is no longer possible for the audience to sit back from a removed perspective to languish in the moral righteousness of its own superior position, for the images used to delineate both sides of the conflict are presented in equally repulsive terms.'

Apart from the thematic content of the films, however, the most striking changes during this decade—most marked during the past two years—are in the style of depicting violence. People have always been raped, killed, injured, bludgeoned, axed, stabbed and shot in films, have died, suffered, had fits, diseases and seizures. The difference is that now audiences seem to want to see these things in alarming if not necessarily realistic detail. (It is essential to recognise here, of course, that what constitutes 'realism' or 'naturalism' will alter from period to period. *The Dreyfus Affair* and *The Life of Charles Peace* seemed terrifyingly realistic to turn-of-the-century audiences; and holographic representations may in the future make 70s film realism seem by comparison as crudely approximate as these archaic films now appear to us.)

When people were shot in films of the 30s and 40s, the effect was a graceful subsidence and a discreet dark stain on the shirt front (for gun shots then always went neatly to the heart, or to the lower thigh if the drama called only for injury). With the proliferation of colour films, ketchuppy red stuff might be more liberally splashed around; but it was still recognisably a convention, and gave no offence. Since the day of *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Wild Bunch* (both reckoned at the time to touch unacceptable extremes of violent representation), death and wounding on the screen have been shown in sickeningly graphic form. Special effects and make-up people have achieved a new importance, devising little explosive sacs which discharge realistic spouts of blood, and plastic skin which can be cut and carved. With the new realism of the 50s, people in shock started to retire considerably behind trees or into bathrooms to heave and retch a little. In time this much politeness was set aside, and they would dribble unconvincingly in full view. Since *The Exorcist* (cf. *Death Weekend*) we have been obliged to savour all the colour and texture and extent of regurgitations.

This change in the shock quality of violence implies a change in its significance for the audience. The euphemistic depictions of films of the 30s and 40s enabled audiences to enjoy a painless, vicarious participation in violent action of the kind denied them in their everyday lives. Today, with heightened shock tactics and the use of technical means (slow motion and close-up) for extra emphasis, the audience is obliged to share in the horror much more directly and painfully. Nor is it horror only that they share. Characteristically, the violence often involves the degradation of the victim; and the audience is required to join in this too. Every effort is made through the shooting



Blood-boltered: Sissy Spacek in 'Carrie'

and recording to make the audience experience the sensations of being crushed, splashed, battered and sicked on.

There is not a conspiracy of wicked men throughout the world to expose audiences to hurtful and perhaps harmful expressions of violence in films. Film-makers and film merchants simply react pragmatically to the predicted and predictable demands of the audience itself. The appearance of so much violence and horror, and of such a degree, implies a demand, a desire and a need. How widespread is the demand is suggested by the fairly new phenomenon already noted, that extremes of violence and sensation are no longer the territory only of frank exploitation films, but are seen as necessary concomitants of prestige productions distributed by the large, reputable film companies.

It would be foolish to try to arrive at any facile explanation of the phenomenon and its possible social effects when sociologists and psychologists have consistently failed to agree. Certain factors are self-evident, but only part of the picture. Aptly but partially, Ralph Berets has said:

'It seems to this writer that the discussion is really focused on a central cultural problem that is reflected not only in the arts but also in the political and social arena. Violence has always been a part of American culture, perhaps a central part of most cultures, but it has recently gone to greater extremes than seems psychologically defensible. This is partly a result of the national crisis that followed the assassination of several political leaders. How is a culture that is seething with hatred, antagonism, radical social discrepancies, and has a finger on the trigger at all times, to portray in its arts a valid reflection of these problems? . . .

'Man usually resorts to violence when he is frustrated or sees no other options for himself . . . An analogous relationship between the occurrence of violence and alternatives exists in the film medium. Contemporary culture has evolved few viable options to the malaise and alienation experienced by most individuals. Films are reflective of these conditions, and conse-

*'Why So Much Violence in Films', Journal of the Producers' Guild of America, December 1975.



Dressed to kill: Robert De Niro in 'Taxi Driver'

quently postulate solutions within the boundary of contemporary possibilities, which are extremely limited. The filmmaker, seeking to be responsive to his time, characters and narrative, must provide a resolution even though he has none to offer that is philosophically viable, therefore violence is invoked as a dramatically engrossing dimension, as a technologically challenging possibility, and as a sociologically necessary conclusion.'

Of course the time is out of joint; but then it always was. We have to cope with the age of Vietnam, of the Kennedy killings, the Moors Murders, Gary Gilmore. Ninety years ago they had Jack the Ripper, Mayerling and awful things happening in the colonies. Perhaps economic insecurity and uncertainty disorients people more than frightening but individual public events. Frequently it has seemed that periods of extreme economic instability have produced upsurges of horror films (Germany in the early 20s; the United States in the early 30s). We pinch ourselves to distract from the pain of having our teeth drilled. Max Wall has an off-colour, surrealist, racist joke about a man who suffers agony from the cut-price false teeth made for him by his brother-in-law, until one day he goes out fishing, hooks a shark and then gets the line tangled round his testicles as the shark swims rapidly away. 'And since then, Solly,' he says, 'I haven't felt the pain from your teeth at all.'

After cause, what of effects? Does screen violence really have an effect upon the people who watch it, needing, according to Roger Corman, always stronger and stronger fixes? This is one of those areas in which the experience of the professional critic is not generally illuminating. With such a massive intake of screen material, there is bound to be a degree of detachment. Certainly observation does not indicate that Dilys Powell, Patrick Gibbs, Felix Barker, Margaret Hinxman and colleagues have suffered any monstrous metamorphosis as a result of exposure (though one stand-in critic, less inured, was found in a faint after

The Last Woman). It may, however, be an indication of the long-term effect of such a diet, that critics no longer always bother to mention in their reviews violent content, except in the more extreme cases. The critical response reflects an inevitable process of immunisation or growing insensitivity to degrees of horror.

Dr. Malcolm Carruthers, of the Maudsley, well loved by the press since he carried out advanced physiological tests on viewers of *Clockwork Orange* and *Soldier Blue*, testing their hearts and urine content before and after the experience, is on record (in the *Sun*) as saying, 'Violence is the new pornography'. This echoes the view of Arthur Schlesinger Jr. at the time of *Bonnie and Clyde*, when he propounded the idea of a new pornography of violence. At that time Lawrence Alloway pointed out that if we accept as a criterion of what constitutes pornography 'visual and verbal material that exceeds what is socially tolerable in significant form', the term is inappropriate. Dr. Carruthers, however, has no doubt of the long-term harm effected by the escalation of violence on the screen: 'In any normal person there are always these two divided reactions—excitement and revulsion. But as people see more and more scenes of violence, the amount of revulsion they feel gets less and less. In other words they become blasé about violence. They come to regard violence in society as more and more normal.'

The Home Office has already in draft a study of the effects of screen violence, considering among other aspects imitation, arousal, effect on social attitudes. Meanwhile, the evidence from which we can gauge either short-term or long-term effects upon audiences is thin. Reports from the United States speak of audiences which scream along with the girl throughout the last two or three reels of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. The *Daily Mail* reported a New York showing of *Two Minute Warning*: 'For a few moments the atmosphere in that cinema was pure bull-ring. At least half the audience were on their feet pointing and bawling. It was a frightening insight into the kind of blood lust that appears to be gripping American society.' (It goes without saying that the audience was rooting for the sniper, not for the cops.) The writer of *Death Wish* has recorded his revulsion at seeing how violently audiences express their identification with Bronson the killer vigilante.

British audiences are not this demonstrative. An attempt to seek some kind of enlightenment from first-hand observation of London audiences for recent key films of violence was a dismal failure. They don't let on much in Leicester Square. It seemed significant only that the audience for *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* was notably younger than that for *Death Weekend* (the one walk-out from the former was the only couple apparently over 25). Only one scene in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* produced a reaction from the audience observed: they found the desperate efforts of a cripple—one of the victims—to heave his wheelchair up a step irresistibly comic. First appearances might suggest indifference, sometimes extending to revulsion voiced after the screening. But apart from the rashness of such a generalisation, behaviour

in the theatre would still not account for *presence* in the theatre—the attraction of such publicity as the *Death Weekend* poster slogan, or of the come-on advertising for *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*: 'Caution: There are scenes in this film that may be disturbing to some members of the public.'

To return to Dr. Carruthers: if one makes the obvious assumption that there is a certain therapeutic and social value in inspiring revulsion at violence, and distinct dangers in exciting pleasure or, perhaps worse, in encouraging apathy, certain recent decisions which indicate the way that official censorship bodies are dealing with the phenomenon give cause for disquiet. In particular these decisions refer to Pasolini's last film and testament, *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*. *Salò* exemplifies supremely Carruthers' revulsion reaction. It is a truly repellent film and a painful experience. It is true that if it were shown audiences would undoubtedly flock in hopes of salacious shock; and would probably be driven away as fast. Revulsion is the very purpose and method of Pasolini's dreadful vision. Here, uniquely, is a film which depicts violence as horrible, without any attempt to seduce, thrill or excite its audience. The intention and effect of the film is, however mercilessly, to cleanse and cauterise. It is a ruthlessly moral film.

The BBFC argued its decision to refuse a certificate convincingly. The Board rejected the possibility that *Salò* might be cut, since this 'would destroy the film's purpose by making the horrors less revolting and therefore more acceptable; a turn-on rather than a turn-off.' The Board considered it unlikely that the film 'would be found obscene by British law under the test of a tendency to deprave and corrupt, since matter which is intended to cause aversion or revulsion rather than a tendency to imitate is not normally considered obscene in British law.' However, 'until there is some clarification or amendment of the law on gross indecency, it would be difficult to certificate this film in Britain. Even given such a development, however, the material is of such an extreme nature that we would almost certainly feel it right to leave the ultimate decision on its acceptability to individual local authorities.'

The first local authority to see the film was the GLC, reckoned the most liberal in the country. The viewing committee, which subsequently awarded 'X' certificates to *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and to *Je t'aime, moi non plus*, Serge Gainsbourg's romance of buggery in low places, starring Jane Birkin and Joe Dallessandro, rejected *Salò* flat. While they are indulged in the dubious pleasures of Tobe Hooper's trashy and degrading film, then, the London audience is spared the scarifying of Pasolini's most uncompromising work of art. James Ferman's rationalisation is too pat: 'In Britain we did not have the experience of the concentration camps, the brutality. *Salò* is irrelevant to our experience.' (What about *Texas Chain Saw Massacre*? 'Well, that's just without importance.') Where violence for kicks and titillation is allowed while *Salò* is not, it must appear that the test of acceptability is palatability. Even the old monster of 'a tendency to deprave and corrupt' is more honest. ■



'Alice, ou la dernière fugue': Sylvia Kristel

CHABROL'S GAME OF MIRRORS

David Overbey

One of several cultural shocks which the English-speaking cinéophile in France must survive is the singularly Gallic judgment on films and directors. The predilection of the French for Jerry Lewis is of course notorious. Perhaps less well-known in Britain and America is that the French, in general, do not hold the work of Claude Chabrol in very high esteem. The last of his films to have had generally good critical notices and solid box-office receipts was *Les Noces Rouges* in 1973, seven films ago (not counting the medium-length films and various episodes shot for French television). It is ironic that French critics usually find Chabrol too commercial, while French filmgoers evidently do not find him commercial enough. On the other hand, a short cigarette advertisement parodying the Bogart *films noirs* of the 40s (a 'commercial' project if ever there was one) was so overwhelmingly popular with everybody, including the critics, that it played in Paris cinemas for over three years and was often advertised in newspapers as well as outside the cinemas.

A further irony is that, aside from earlier Chabrol films which have never been released in English-speaking countries, most American and English critics are now several films behind. *Une Partie de Plaisir* (1974) is only now turning up on the 'Ten Best' lists of the New York critics and (except for a London Festival screening) has not yet been shown in Britain. Thus, most critical evaluations of Chabrol in English are, at the very least, dated. A few years ago—during Chabrol's 'third period'—this would have been a minor matter. Then he seemed to be composing variations on a theme in which stylistic nuances and plot manipulations were alternative approaches within a given psycho-philosophical range. With his last three films, however, Chabrol has reached a turning-point in his career, and has set off on a trek into new and rather startling areas.

Les Magiciens, which opened last May just before the Cannes Festival during that always disastrous week when film critics seem too busy to attend to their work, was a commercial catastrophe, running exactly one week on its Paris release. Those critics who bothered to review the film at all followed the lead of *Image et Son's* André Cornard: 'It is disappointing to see the auteur of *Le Boucher* wasting his talent and taking pleasure in filming no matter what... Everything is false, superficial, boring... tourist publicity.' Only the subject and its treatment seem to have bothered the critic, however. He found the film still proof that Chabrol is a 'great technical master'.

And so he is; the director takes obvious pleasure in long tracking shots along a beach, a series of zoom shots wickedly exploring décor, and a fake magic act in which heads separate from bodies to float

about. Despite the verdict of the French critics, the film is fascinating, both *per se* and as a pivotal work in Chabrol's career. Set in Tunisia on the island of Djerba, the film's three plot strands/themes are woven into a unified serio-comic melodrama: the impact of tourism on the local culture, not to mention the mentality represented by a particularly awful hotel in which the 'natives' are unwelcome as guests but are fully exploited as servants; Chabrol's customary treatment of bourgeois marriage, adultery and jealousy; and a magician with pretensions to clairvoyance who recounts his obscure but 'prophetic' vision of a murder to a Machiavellian tourist who, in a fit of ineffable ennui, manipulates the conditions in which the envisioned murder will occur. This last is particularly interesting in that it throws into relief the whole subject of the relationship of *mise en scène* to fantasy and reality.

When Chabrol's next project, *Folies Bourgeoises* (*The Twist*), was announced, it seemed possible that the subject would lend itself to a comic development of those same themes set within his omnipresent bourgeoisie, for the plot involved marriage and infidelity with husband and wife creating and 'directing' fantasies to feed their jealousies and take their revenge. However, while his creation of the coolly fashionable Paris *littérati* and the fantasies set in an avant-garde theatre and the Crazy Horse Saloon continued to demonstrate technical mastery, the film seemed misfired and flat, more Vadim than Buñuel in its overpowering décor. Released widely throughout France, it received universally hostile reviews. The fact that it also did little business was at least partially explained by its June release date, for the French seem to devote the summer entirely to *les vacances*, leaving art to fend for itself without them for three months.

After five successive critical and commercial failures, Chabrol might have been excused had he run for cover by finding a 'sure-fire' subject. Instead, returning to *Les Magiciens*, he re-engaged himself in the exploration of the fantastic. *Alice, ou la dernière fugue* begins where many of his bourgeois melodramas end: with the disintegration of an unhappy upper-middle-class marriage. Within moments after the film has begun, however, this link to his earlier work is stretched to a fineness which only close criticism by an over-enthusiastic auteurist could render visible.

Fleeing Paris and her outrageously bourgeois husband, Alice has car trouble on the road at night and takes refuge from a storm in an old dark house. Instead of gothic horror, she finds civilised sympathy, dinner and a warm, dry bed—none of it sinister. It is only upon awakening the following morning that a series of odd and fantastic events begin to happen to her. She accepts everything without fear, and soon everything is 'explained' to her. Although the film is France's entry this year in the Avoriaz Fantastic Film Festival, it might be argued that *Alice* is not so much within the genre as it is an extended contemplation, stripped of all psychology and plot tension, in which Chabrol examines death, transformation, identity and the philosophical implications of the relationship between 'reality' and film, through a



Stefania Sandrelli and Jean Rochefort in 'Les Magiciens'

series of extraordinarily sensual images aligned to each other by hard logic, playful irony and a sympathy for the human condition which most critics (French and Anglo-American) usually deny the director.

If irony seems a particularly French trait, then Chabrol is very French indeed. Even as he laughs (which is often) there is a glint in his eyes which suggests that part of himself is removed from the joke and that he is amused at himself for laughing in the first place. He speaks quickly, often finishing a sentence with the wave of a hand or the lift of an eyebrow while his mind and tongue are already at work on the next one. I have never seen a printed interview with him (including this one, alas) which has caught exactly the flavour of his conversation, peppered as it is with argot and well-placed vulgarities. It would be a mistake to take for the absolute truth everything he says. It is not that he lies; indeed, he is

astonishingly honest both about his own work and his reaction to the work of others. Simply, he loves pranks, jokes, paradoxes and games. The evening following our conversation, Chabrol gave a brief interview on television in which he was asked some of the same questions. His answers were not necessarily contradictory to those which follow here; they were merely different.

In America and England, you are something of a cultural hero, but . . .

CHABROL: Yes, I know. In France, not at all.

Why is that? Because you hold a mirror up to the French and they don't like what they see?

Not particularly. I think it's more complicated than that. Many of my films are simply not understood here as they are in the Anglo-Saxon countries. *Une Partie de Plaisir*, for example, was a complete flop here, while it had some success in America.

Stéphane Audran, Bruce Dern in 'Folies Bourgeoises'





'Alice': Sylvia Kristel

It was of course very French and some nations like that; but more than that, here in France other, more passionate connections were made which have nothing to do with a work of art. Here they know me. You know, no one is a hero to his valet. The film was destroyed by the critics; they all know Gégauff,* and they don't like him.

There was also *Les Magiciens*. I liked that film and thought it a scandal that it lasted exactly one week in Paris.

I like it too. With that one the distributor went quite mad during that period. Anyway, the film was never given a chance. The producers were Arabs, and the credits were full of Arab names. Tarak Ben Ammar presents . . . That irritated them. You know what I am talking about. Then another thing was my fault. I tried to give it an Anglo-Saxon flavour at the beginning even though the story wasn't at all Anglo-Saxon. Anyhow, the novel by Frédéric Dard on which the film was based finally didn't inspire me all that much. What interested me was going to Tunisia to explore the situation there. The French seemed to think that because the producers were Tunisian I was making a publicity film on the beauties of Tunisia, which wasn't the case at all. I was there to show the horrible side of things: look at that monstrous hotel and those awful people.

You then made *Folies Bourgeoises* in English.

I've made more than one film in English—remember *Le Scandale*?—and they have always been catastrophes. I made *Le Scandale* in two versions, but I made this horrible stupidity, *Folies Bourgeoises*, in English only. It was all very complicated. The film got away from me very quickly. I started it just as my contract ended, but I felt somehow morally obliged to make it anyway. It wasn't what I wanted and I was wrong to do it, though it could have been a good film. It should have—and could have—been made on a small budget.

Have you made other films you think are bad?

I've done a lot of bad films, but I was

*The screenwriter Paul Gégauff, who plays the lead in *Une Partie de Plaisir*.

always aware of it; I knew they were bad while I was making them. I must make awful crap from time to time. It is professionally inescapable, but it bothers me to do such things with material I care about. I would rather take a garbage can and throw everything awful into it at once. Sometimes such a film will be very popular. I have made frightful rubbish which went down very well with critics and public alike.

Les Innocents aux Mains Sales?

Yes. I know it wasn't all that good and I didn't like a lot of things about it, but there was an enormous ambiguity about it. In my mind it was a comic film, but the actors wouldn't follow me. Except for the two cops and Jean Rochefort. The rest, no. Certainly not Rod Steiger and Romy Schneider! Romy took it all seriously as some sort of tragedy, but it was just a gag. I wonder what happened to me. What was so good about the book (although it was a *bad* little thriller) was that the further it went the madder it got, and if we had captured that idea, that tone, it could have been comic and wonderful. I finally got fed up. I didn't even direct that film finally; I played chess.

But you almost always make comic films.

Yes, I know that, but my actors have to know it too. In *Alice* they all knew it was a very serious film, but they also realised the necessity of a light touch.

And *Le Beau Serge*? Is it true that you said you thought it was insupportable?

Yes. And I still think so. It is the most tricked-up film I have ever made. It is sneaky, fabricated, manipulated. There is just enough pretension to make me uncomfortable, but that isn't its main fault. It was premeditated not so much to make the film work but to get good notices and a nice advance on receipts. I needed the money so badly at the time that I made the film with that in mind, in order to allow myself to make others. You can sense that in it. I like the description of the countryside, but the rest not very much.

In a recent SIGHT AND SOUND there was an article about your work by Fassbinder. Among other things, he said that there were no people in most of your films, only shadows. He claims that the later films

exhibit a latent fascism which has always been implicit in your work; in *Dr. Popaul*, for example. He also objects to your use of the zoom, calling it something like 'the saddest device in the cinema', and saying that if it didn't exist you would have invented it. Would you care to comment?

What do you want, ping-pong? I see! No, I have no comments really. Well, as for fascism: Popaul is a fascist, yes. But does making a film about fascism make one a fascist? I'm very happy that Fassbinder thought it worthwhile to waste his time writing about me. I shouldn't think that anyone as busy as he must be would take the time. I certainly wouldn't.

Do you like Fassbinder's films?

From time to time. Of course he invented the *plan fixe*. He has a certain merit. It is very difficult, after all, to make any film in Germany at all. I don't agree with what he said about me, but what he said is of no importance.

And the French cinema? I asked Alain Resnais why the French cinema was sick, and he denied it, arguing that there are never more than five or six good directors working in any national cinema, and that those few are enough to keep a cinema healthy. Do you agree?

In a sense I do. But the health of a cinema doesn't really come from its good directors, it comes from the good movies of its bad directors. In the great epoch of American cinema, that is exactly what happened. A nothing director sometimes ended up every four or five years making a good film. That was remarkable. In France we have the reverse situation, in which good directors are almost forced to make bad films. Either they are given bad scenarios, or they do it for the money or for personal reasons. There simply is not an industrial organisation which allows for good films. One must understand this about France, and that's what I criticise. There should be one. It's primarily the fault of distributors and exhibitors who always try to find a new success by way of prior hits. That's the worst way.

There is nothing then that you care for in current French films? Bresson, for example?

Ah, Bresson! Yes. I detest Bresson. I think he's completely in the wrong. But yes, I see what you mean. He is at least seeking something. Most directors aren't even looking. They just tell a story; some of them do it very well. That's all right, but it's not enough. It's boring. There is a film by Maurice Pialat which I like, *La Gueule Ouverte*. That was magnificent. He too is seeking. He makes no compromises. He is a madman that way.

And the young film-makers? Claude Miller's *La Meilleure Façon de Marcher*, for example?

It's a good movie, but it's a *film putain*. That's fine for a first film, of course. A first film has to be a *film putain*. If not, there will be no second film.

There is a good deal of talk in France at the moment about the wonders of 'le nouveau naturel'. What is that exactly?

That's where they give actors only a vague idea of what is supposed to be said: 'You just got back from a holiday in St. Tropez, and you from Brittany. Now you'll

have coffee together and talk about your holidays. Give me two minutes, please.' The poor actors then have to make two minutes out of a cup of coffee. *Voilà 'le nouveau naturel'.*

I assume then that in your case everything is written beforehand?

Yes, there's very little improvisation. In *Alice*, for example, there is none at all. And even when there is some, it isn't really improvisation. Something might come up while we are shooting, such as an idea from an actor, but we always write it down and try it out first, so that's not improvisation. Then, when Stéphane [Audran] has a very long speech I always give it to her ahead of time so that she can rearrange it until she feels comfortable with it. She does what she wants, but it is a written text, so that isn't improvisation either. Anyway, it is already hard enough to get an actor to give a good performance without asking him to make up dialogue as well.

You haven't made a film in black and white in about fifteen years, yet I've heard you say you like black and white.

I don't have enough money to shoot in black and white. It is very expensive now, a luxury, especially since the laboratories are now set up entirely for colour processing. For a black and white film to be sold and shown, it has to be a really superlative film. But I love it very much. There are things one can do in black and white which are impossible in colour. There is a purity of line, for example, that can't happen in colour.

You used to play with colour, as in *A Double Tour*, but not so much any more.

Ah, yes. So long ago! Now it bothers me. I find it stupid to play that way; perhaps I just got bored with it. It is stupid to think about putting a blue carpet there, a red one here, because while I want people to keep a certain distance from the film, the use of colour in that way distances an audience too much. An audience and a film can be absolutely crushed by décor, which gets attention instead of more important things. In *Le Scandale* there was no red at all; then at the very end everything was red. But that's a children's game. It doesn't interest me any more.

***Alice* is dedicated to Fritz Lang. There is a sequence at the beginning in which the husband's face keeps reappearing, getting larger each time. That's from *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, I assume. Is there anything else of Lang which I missed?**

Well, it was *Mabuse*, which I saw early on at a ciné-club, that made me want to direct in the first place. That's true, not just sentiment. As for influences and homages: you know, very often what is important is not what one borrows nor that one imitates what someone else has done. In *Alice*, for example, I refused to do all the things that Lang had refused to do. Lang rejected false effects; I won't have them either. I had already decided to do the film that way, but Lang died while we were shooting *Alice*, and that strengthened my decision. I decided that if I liked the film I would dedicate it to Lang, and when I was finished I found many things in it that were reminiscent of him. I wanted Lang to make a film here with my producer, and we had long discussions about

projects. One of them had to do with death. Of course, he had already made a film about death, *Destiny*, which also had a wall like *Alice*.

You know that one of Lang's last projects contained a sequence at the end in which coloured balls fall from the sky during an LSD trip. That reminds me of *Juste Avant la Nuit*. Is there a connection?

Well, he told me that story and I suppose it was in the back of my mind somewhere. You will just have to believe me when I tell you that when I shot my film I wasn't conscious of it, though of course it must have been there. You know, for that film Lang had in mind having a villain with an artificial heart—one made of iron...

***Alice* is the first time, really, that you have worked with the fantastic.**

Yes, but I've wanted to do so for a long time, and I even had this exact subject in mind. I had a first scenario about six years ago, but it was overloaded. I ended up suppressing things; I pruned it down to essentials and I like it better that way.

And will you continue in this vein?

Yes, although it is not the fantastic in itself that I am drawn to. Rather, there are certain fantasy writers who impress me. Borges, and the short fiction of Dino Buzzati. Not the fantastic itself, because one easily falls into the genre tricks—creaking doors, grimacing faces, horrors. I suppressed all that; no doors creak in *Alice*... Of course there is no real tradition of fantasy cinema in France, nor is there any literary tradition. That's why I leaned so heavily on surrealist painters like Magritte.

Your heroine is named Alice Carroll. Lewis Carroll is obviously the reference...

Yes, although Carroll lost an 'l'. Beware, for in relationship to my film Lewis Carroll is a false trail. That's one of Chabrol's pranks. Oh yes, there is the broken wind-screen which reminds one of the mirror and there are a few other 'fantastic' occurrences. But no, the Lewis Carroll business is neither a path nor a key to anything in the film. That is the joke. Don't forget that the book *Alice* reaches for to read in the house is by Borges. That's much more important.

And the Mozart on the soundtrack?

That is also important. For me, Mozart has always been a composer of simple effects engaged in a search for minuscule, scarcely palpable beauty. He is also a composer who sensed putrefaction and decadence in the simplest things. That is why I chose him. I wanted to give a bizarre continuity of sound to the film. One can't really know why, but it is the concerto which continues throughout the film. The action of the film—the 'real' action—lasts nine minutes and the concerto lasts nine minutes. I tried to create a moment of pure beauty when at the end *Alice* comes out of the salon with Charles Vanel to go up to bed. There is the sound of a violin. It is all of a most extraordinary beauty. I get a thrill when I see that, and I don't care what other people feel about it.

Why did you choose Sylvia Kristel for *Alice*?

I have an old vice. I have to impose challenges on myself. Everyone in France says that Sylvia is a beautiful woman but that she can't act and so has to show her ass

all the time. I thought it would be interesting to dress her and to make her play something very difficult. Remember, she is always alone on the screen. In such cases the problem is always not to feel the presence of the camera; with her, one never does. Then, I found a photograph of Carroll's original *Alice*, whom Sylvia greatly resembles. And also, the film is not really very commercial, and it wasn't such a bad idea to use a well-known star in it. I knew she was a good actress anyway. For some reason, Sylvia is really the only one in France who can get people to come to see skin flicks. A sort of grace, perhaps?

***Alice* seems to end twice, first as *Alice* goes downstairs and through the door, and again when we see the car accident.**

I thought about the car for a long time. I put it in; I took it out. Finally I put it back again because it is very Cartesian. It doesn't explain a thing, of course. Odd, because people seem to think that the final shot explains everything when the contrary is true. It is a question mark. Of course it helps to bring people back to a kind of reality.

And what is reality when one speaks of a film, since film is by definition unreal?

It's all a game that one plays. There are degrees of reality and of unreality. It was amusing to begin the film with a quarrel between husband and wife: that corresponds to a reality. Such realism ends abruptly with a shot that is entirely unrealistic: when the credits come up on the screen to divide the couple, each of them standing in a doorway on either side of the corridor with the light silhouetting them from behind. At that point the jump is easy, but remember that realism is never reality anyway. It's just a game. A game of mirrors. Which is why I wouldn't use laboratory tricks in the film. Instead, towards the end when the décor and staircase become deformed, I did it all in the camera with mirrors. You know, Magritte did a painting of a pipe, and underneath he wrote: 'This is not a pipe.' A woman said to him, 'But of course that is a pipe.' He asked her what one did with a pipe. She replied that one smoked a pipe. 'Smoke that one,' he said.

Vanel's character 'explains' things to *Alice* by saying 'We are the representations of your destiny. Not only representations: we also have our own existence. The difference is that we are transformable.' What does that mean?

That is really the definition of an actor. When an actor plays a role, doesn't he transform himself? I suppose it depends on

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'*Alice*': Chabrol with Charles Vanel



The open texts of NICOLAS ROEG

Robert Phillip Kolker

The great experiments in narrative cinema which took place in the 1960s are over. The economic confusion of the film industry is being echoed in the artistic conservatism of much recent film. In America and elsewhere film-makers seem to be returning to safe structures: 'motivated' characters, closed narrative forms, invisible editing, unobtrusive composition, in short, the zero degree style of classical Hollywood movie-making. Among the old modernists, those film-makers who opened up narrative, fractured it and gave the audience a job of work rather than a morsel to be consumed, many are silent. Some, like Godard, are working but ignored. Others have become melodramatists, like Truffaut, who makes films as if he were Mervyn LeRoy working for MGM in the early 40s. Antonioni has died and been reborn as a production designer. The new modernists, the current experimenters with narrative form, are having a rough time. Altman can't seem to make a film that will make money. Arthur Penn, whose *Night Moves* was an important example of oblique narrative and open text, and therefore ignored, takes refuge in big stars. Ken Russell's films have become puerile. Fassbinder is admired for, among other things, reviving the grand form of 50s melodrama.

Nicolas Roeg is one of the few commercial directors who upholds a spirit of experimentation, who deals with narrative as if it were a flexible structure to be used, rather than a given form to be realised. His films insist that the audience take an active part in the discourse, that they work as hard with the film as the film works with them. He generates a dialogue between audience and film by a combination of plenitude and scarcity. The premise, the 'plot', of any Roeg film is simple, spare, even trite: a gangster takes refuge with a debilitated and delirious rock star; two children, stranded in the Australian wilderness, wander for a time with an Aborigine*; a British architect and restorer of churches loses a daughter and goes to Venice with his wife, where he is warned of danger by a psychic, 'sees' his wife on a funeral gondola, and is killed by an Italian dwarf; a visitor from space organises a huge corporation which is taken over by competitors and the visitor imprisoned.

The telling of the tale is also spare and very oblique. Roeg tends to suppress transitions, withhold almost any sense of motivation, supply the least amount of information possible for an event or an action taken. The *découpage* of the films is not based upon a desire for clear transitions and conventional narrative flow. Great leaps of time and space are made, the connections of which are left unstated. At the same time, the composition of any given shot, often in deep focus, is rich and suggestive, not only in terms of what is going on within the shot, but between shots as well. Roeg is one of the great montage makers of modern cinema, and his narratives depend on the

enormous amount of information offered by the repetition of forms, objects, gestures, colours and sounds from shot to shot and from sequence to sequence.

'Information' is imprecise. Roeg shows much and explains little in his films; they barely exist in terms of argument or paraphrasable content (on the release in America of *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, Cinema Five gave out a sheet of 'explanations' about the film to the audience). They are, rather, perceptual assaults, as Roeg all but hurls signifiers at his audience while withholding, sometimes perversely, the meanings, or signifieds, of his images and his characters' words. Who is the bearded man who watches Thomas Jerome Newton (David Bowie) at the beginning of *The Man Who Fell to Earth* and appears at his bedside near the end? 'We are all being watched' is Roeg's reply, when asked outright. Why does Bryce (Rip Torn) appear in a Santa Claus suit at the end of the film (a sequence cut from the American print)? 'I'm fascinated by the fact that Americans won't go back to a position they once held and left,' says Roeg (Bryce was a professor and then, for a time, a scientist in Newton's corporation). Well, to be sure, *The Man Who Fell to Earth* is very much a study of paranoia as well as a study of America from the outside. But Roeg's explanation of the man who watches and of Bryce in a Santa Claus suit doesn't satisfy, whereas their appearance in the film does. This is not meant to be reductive or anti-interpretative. What I am saying is that Roeg's images and their editorial structure are often more interesting when left unextended to operate within the network of the film.

The anti-discursive quality of Roeg's films is countered, however, by a strong literary and cinematic allusiveness. *Performance* is probably the most allusive film since *Weekend*. Turner (Mick Jagger) tells stories from literary sources throughout, and references to Borges are so extreme that when the camera does its travelling shot

through a gunshot wound in Turner's head, we are shown a picture of Borges. An important moment in *The Man Who Fell to Earth* occurs when Bryce opens a book (published by 'World Enterprises', the company formed by Newton) to a picture of Breughel's 'The Fall of Icarus' and Auden's poem about that picture (and about this picture), 'Musée des Beaux Arts'. There are quotations from Blake and, on the television sets watched obsessively by Newton, episodes from films like *End of the Road*, Wilder's *Love in the Afternoon*, Ustinov's *Billy Budd* and Reed's *The Third Man*. Much of the structure of *Don't Look Now* can be understood by the title of a book written by the main character, John Baxter (Donald Sutherland): *Beyond the Fragile Geometry of Space*.

What occurs in this counterpoint and interconnection of image with image, image with word, image with literary reference, film with film is an enormous structure. A pregnant structure. Roeg's films are great organisms that appear every moment ready to give birth to profound ideas and deep meanings. They never do, but are not any the less wonderful for not doing so, simply because portent itself is their aim. Their signifiers keep generating possibilities, which are sometimes realised on a certain level, as in John Baxter's terrible death in *Don't Look Now*, but which ultimately fold back upon themselves. No matter how far the signifiers seem to lead to meaning, the films finally signify themselves, no matter what the ideological implications of that fact may be.

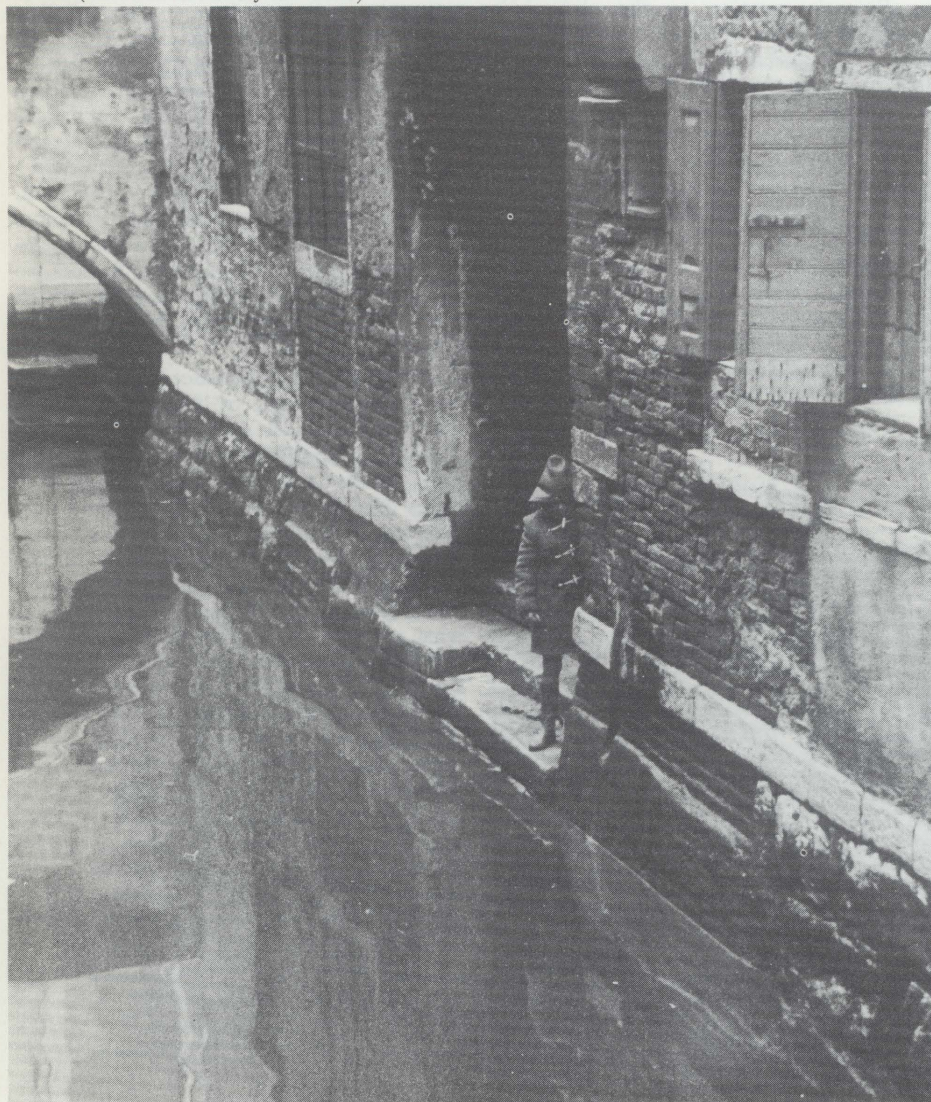
An indication of this short-circuiting occurs in *Don't Look Now*, after Baxter has his fall from the scaffolding in the Venetian church which he has been restoring. He walks with the Bishop, a benign figure who is none the less presented in a very foreboding manner, discussing prophecy. Baxter has been warned by a clairvoyant that he is in danger. They pass a wall poster of Charlie Chaplin which has printed on it the words, in Italian, 'One Against All'. These words—perhaps the Italian title of Chaplin's film—fit well with Baxter's situation: he unknowingly fights alone against mysterious events; he refuses to admit the possibility that these events and his inevitable doom are known in advance, and he meets his end blindly. But the words also apply to the dwarf in the red macintosh who brings about Baxter's end. She has been killing people in Venice all through the film (though we and Baxter take her for an apparition of his dead daughter). The words fit both characters, though the fit is not apparent until the end of the film. The Chaplin reference is inexplicable. Is Baxter or the dwarf Chaplinesque? Is it meant to undercut the seriousness of the goings on? The anomaly of the Chaplin poster may be the very point of its appearance. It is as strange and therefore as unnerving as any of the strange faces, things and events throughout *Don't Look Now* which refer to nothing but themselves and serve only to make us uncomfortable. They lead us to insist on meaning and connection and, when these are not given, our discomfort grows.

The jagged arrangements of image and sound that make up Roeg's films tend to create a dialectic of connection and isolation

**Walkabout* demonstrates much of what is discussed here, but its formal structure is simple, sometimes almost banal. Perhaps after the delirium of *Performance*, and working on his own for the first time, Roeg felt it necessary to pull back. The difference in complexity of the films following *Walkabout* is enormous, though not as extreme as *Performance*.



'Don't Look Now': the beginning (Baxter wades into the pond where his little girl has drowned) and the end (the homicidal dwarf in Venice)



between characters and between the characters and the viewer. In *Performance* the identities of Chas (James Fox) and Turner slide in and out of each other. When Chas kills the bookmaker Joey after the latter has beaten him up and wrecked his flat, we see Chas from behind in a point of view shot from another gang member. Only the head we see from behind is not Chas but Turner, an event we could not understand on first viewing because we haven't yet been introduced to Turner. In a sequence cut from the American print of *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, we see Bryce making love to one of his students while, far away, Newton sleeps. The images are intercut, but the sounds of love-making carry over the image of Newton until they wake him up. Bryce and Newton haven't yet met, though when they do they will be most important to each other. Bryce will eventually betray Newton, physically and emotionally.

The films are filled with the portent of people, total strangers, who know one another, who are somehow connected and are most certainly able to affect one another. At the same time, they are concerned with aliens, with individuals thoroughly cut off from each other and at odds with the environment they find themselves in. Hence the structure of like/unlike images, incongruent interconnections, causes and effects with no immediate logic of cause and effect.

Roeg's films are open texts, as open and strange to us as the fictional worlds they create are to the fictional characters who inhabit them. As I suggested earlier, few recent film-makers have been so intent on making the viewer so active a participant in the unfolding of the narrative.* Roeg makes us aid the telling of the story and therefore makes us part of the discourse. He denies us passivity by eschewing most of the devices of standard film narrative. There is no melodramatic sweep of emotion, even no major empathy with the characters. We may be watchful with John Baxter in discovering what trouble may come to him, and we may react with his fall from the scaffolding and recoil from his death. Some feeling is elicited for Newton, particularly when he is imprisoned and probed. But fundamentally our stock in the characters is small, and our interest concerned in puzzling out events and following clues which refuse to lead us very far. We are distanced from the films, forced to ask questions (Why is there an interchange of identities between Chas and Turner in *Performance*? Why does the Aborigine die at the end of *Walkabout*?), questions that the text will not answer for us.

An obvious example: why does everyone else age radically in the course of *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, while Newton remains the same? There is no indication of enormous amounts of time passing; there is no verbal indication that this process is noticed by the characters. But it happens, and the fact that no one mentions it makes it all the more obvious to us. The effect is curious. The first time we see that Farnsworth (Buck Henry) is beginning to go bald and grey, our reaction is to doubt our own perceptions. When his age advances and the other characters grow old as well, our

*For a theory of the open text, see Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meanings in the Cinema*; Roland Barthes, *S/Z*.

reaction is one of annoyance. Why is there no clue as to reasons? What is the film's time scheme? The same for other events in the film: Who is the black man in relation to this group? Why can't the doctors find alien signs in Newton's body?

A certain alienation effect is achieved by all this. Roeg's films are neither emotionally inviting nor intellectually comfortable. They do not efface themselves by making their form invisible. Quite the contrary. They call so much attention to themselves that we are forced actively to question why the signs are arranged as they are and what is their signification. More, we are forced to complete the signifying system that each film sets up. But because the system can never be completed, we are finally frustrated by the possibilities offered. We are assaulted with images seemingly pregnant with meaning; we are forced to come to active perceptual terms with them and weave them into a text; we are left unfulfilled because we are unable to finish with the text and leave it comfortably behind. We are, in short, like a Roeg character: aliens in a strange land, trying to make sense of our perceptions, and failing.

In *Don't Look Now*, the alienation effect begins with the first two shots. The first, over which the title appears, is a zoom in on a pond in the rain. The signifier is immediately recognisable, 'motivated' in the sense that it is an image we are familiar with outside of film. We are able to assimilate it and wait to see where it will lead. We are frustrated, for it dissolves into an 'unmotivated' shot, an abstraction, something that appears to be a vertically arranged pattern of shining dots, on which the camera pans, catching the sun. There is no recognition, no association can be made. The shot remains disconnected until well into the film, when it turns up again, this time identified as the curtained window of the Baxters' Venice hotel room. This kind of long distance matching of shots (or of objects within shots) is almost a Roeg obsession and provides visual rhythm and continuity within the film.

With his love of Blake, Roeg insists on

'We are all being watched . . .' The mysterious onlooker after the space-ship landing in 'The Man Who Fell to Earth'

setting up a fearful symmetry in his films which unifies the structure on a formal level and, on a content level, indicates the illogical association of things and people. The opening two shots of *Don't Look Now*, one apprehendable, the other not, serve the function of setting us back from the film, putting us in the situation of observers. The following section reinforces this effect. The abstract pattern dissolves—with the sounds of rain, church bells and someone humming on the track—to black and then to a shot of a little girl in a red macintosh, playing with a wheelbarrow. There follows a series of about seven shots, relatively short, of the red-coated child playing by a pond with a red striped ball. An older boy on a bike also appears. The shots are low and wide angled, slightly distorted, and while attractive in their country setting, slightly discomfoting.

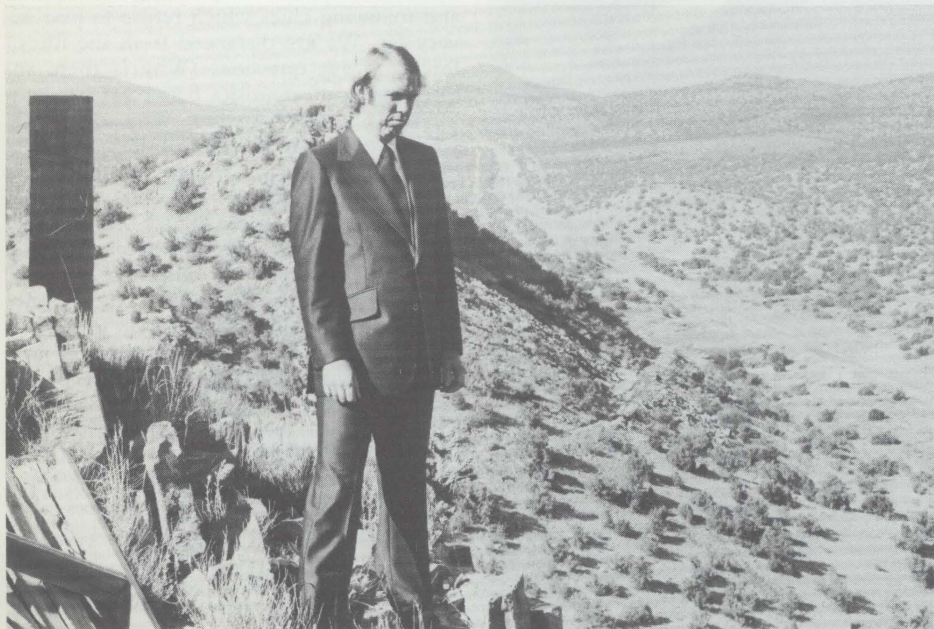
At the end of this series there is a long shot of the girl in the red mac bending over the pond where her ball has landed; a house is seen in the distance. There is a cut to a close reverse shot and the camera zooms to the child's reflection in the water. Throughout this opening sequence, cutting has been done to pick up a desultory rhythm of the children's playing. At the end of the zoom the first major edit to signify an uncomfortable association occurs: from the reflection of the child the cut is to a fire indoors with a zoom back to reveal Laura (Julie Christie) and John Baxter (Donald Sutherland) in their home, John looking at slides in a projector. In the shots that follow we see Baxter's reaction to the slide he's examining: a point of view from his position looking at a screen with Laura seated in the background; a clear look at the slide itself, which shows a figure in red seated in a church pew. John does not remark on what he sees. Laura mentions a question asked by their daughter: 'If the world is round, why is a frozen pond flat?' We return to the slide, which is removed from the projector and placed under a magnifying glass. The camera zooms in on the red figure and we cut back to the reflection of the red-coated child in the pond.

The only dialogue has been the interchange between John and Laura on their

little girl's question, a question of childish logic which will in fact be the logic of the whole film. *Don't Look Now* is constructed on the questions arising from understood facts conflicting with confusing perceptions. The association of Baxter's daughter in her red mac and the strange red figure in church is based on nothing but the coincidence of events and the perception of those events, a coincidence that happens to link both these figures with death. The paradox, of course, is that there is no coincidence at all; Roeg has managed and manipulated the association. The text is coded so that all the images, signs, events and dialogue that make it up refer to and control the association. The fiction of *Don't Look Now* hinges on Baxter seeing on a slide a figure who looks like his soon to be dead daughter, seeing this figure again in Venice, hearing from a clairvoyant that he is in danger, seeing his wife on a funeral gondola, finally confronting the figure in red, who turns out to be a homicidal dwarf.

Of course the text is just waiting to be given occult meanings, and certainly the film's popularity can be understood in this light. But the film is not about the occult as much as it is about the way we are made to see things that, from one perspective, might have occult meanings. The film is about Roeg making us look. We see Baxter's daughter playing in her red mac and we see the red-coated figure in church on Baxter's slide. We and Baxter see his nemesis projected from a piece of film. But then we see *everything* projected from a piece of film. When Baxter, a character created through film, unknowingly, sees his own (film fiction) doom on film, he and the audience embark on a similar expedition: that of aliens wandering through a mass of confusing and foreboding perceptions (think of the film's title). Just like Thomas Jerome Newton in *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, who attempts to learn an alien culture by watching television, and knows less the more he sees, so we and Baxter are given visual data which appear to be bursting with significance, yet admit nothing.

As the opening sequence proceeds, this tenuous association of filmed-film image (the red figure on the slide) and filmed-diegetic image (Baxter's daughter in the red mac) grows stronger. There is another series of shots of the children playing outside and of the Baxters indoors, examining slides. At one point, responding to the question about the round earth and the flat pond, Baxter says significantly, 'Nothing is what it seems.' In a long shot, we see the child throw her red ball. We cut to Baxter throwing a packet of cigarettes to his wife. He steps forward and knocks over a glass. We barely see the glass, but we hear a loud crash which carries over to the next shot: a short take of the red ball falling into the pond. The following shot is of the broken glass lying over the slide. Shot of Baxter wiping up. Shot of the ball in the water. Shot of brother bending over his red bike. Shot of Baxter, in the same bending position, over the slide: the camera tracks over his head and peers through the magnifying glass at the red figure in the church. A closer shot of the slide shows the red dye bleeding. In the next series of shots, Baxter



In The Picture

Computers Behind the Screen

A conference on computers in film and television? One day of it, at Imperial College, London, was almost too long in terms of the number of subjects raised (from the predictable development of holographic sound storage to the use of computerised camera controls in shooting special effects), though not long enough to allow discussion. But it was a fair beginning.

Dr. Colin Besant and Dr. Alan Jebb reported on their work with computer animation at Imperial College, inspired originally by their research consultant, Stan Hayward. Their mechanical engineering department was using the computer as it is used by designers in the aerospace and motor industries, where graphic displays draw three-dimensional, animated blueprints and simulate conditions of normal use. To illustrate the link between such industrial applications and film animation, they screened a few computer-aided or computer-reproduced films, made on early and by now superseded machines.

The primitive quality of these early computer-generated images so distressed the next speaker (Roy Pace, managing director of Camera Effects Ltd.) that he launched into a somewhat Luddite attack, with statements like '... the machine cannot supersede the intention of the artist.' The conference never quite recovered its equilibrium, since the points needed to be argued at length, and facts for such arguments could only come from the laboratories of the big computer companies, where they are developing far more versatile graphic equipment. But such developments are more or less secret, for while research foundations and universities can present their work in progress at semi-technical conferences, the manufacturing companies like to make carefully timed worldwide announcements.

Detailed reports on the use of computers as management aids in television came from Pat Hawker and Christopher Rowley of the IBA, and in smoothly generalised terms from Terry Smith of the BBC. In addition to information

storage and retrieval, forecasting and decision making, the IBA also use computers for technical tasks such as monitoring transmitters, and will increasingly use them for working out schedules and balancing programmes. Neither the BBC nor the IBA plans to emulate NHK, the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation, the most highly computerised network in the world at present. Pat Hawker felt that IBA employees would resist the Japanese degree of automation, because TV people are jealously proud of the 'image' of their programmes and value the human touch, even occasional muddle and misdirection. However, the Japanese, having invested in larger and more complex systems, obtain more use from them.

A creative programmer, Richard Monkhouse, showed on closed circuit sets his commercially viable video tapes, programmed on a hybrid computer configuration for a Spectron video synthesiser. His tapes, combining abstract patterns with figures like girls dancing, have only been used in limited ways, like providing décor in a disco; but it is a pity that the video synthesiser was not discussed further, for it seems that once the hardware is discounted (as management aids within the TV companies), the software investment for such tapes would work out much cheaper than the cost of stop-frame animation for TV titles and captions.

At present, computers provide a practical connection between films and TV. Videotapes can be processed on computers to clean up blurred pictures transmitted by satellite. This technique is also applied to old film stock, which is transferred to tape and fed to a computer where the outlines are resolved and colour intensities restored, so that a clearer and brighter picture can go straight on to TV. *Gone With the Wind* was recently reconstructed on videotape for TV screening from a 1956 Technicolor dye transfer print by a company called Image Transform Inc. in California. The corrections included noise reduction, image enhancement, scene by scene treatment for colour balance, contrast and brightness. This process is patented, but the technique of taking video signals apart and putting

them together by computer is well known.

Animation studios covet the computer's skill of repeating an image any number of times, with or without variations. This could cut down the number of key drawings and abolish the drudgery of tracing. But a computer can manipulate images in many ways; it can even create a three-dimensional experience. These skills were developed for the technical designer and testing laboratory, but whatever can be done to an aeroplane or machine part could be done to Mickey Mouse or Nasruddin. Devices such as electronic sketch pads and stylos could be superb tools for stimulating creative thinking; but although they are being developed and improved all the time, they are still too expensive for art schools or studios. Animation is, after all, a cottage industry.

John Halas, president of the international association of animators (ASIFA), recalled that for *Animal Farm* he had the choice of working for seventy years, or employing seventy animators for one year. The idea of saving labour attracted him to computers, and he proceeded to explore contexts in which the expense could be met. Apart from companies like Boeing, he found that only educational establishments could obtain money for experiments; by 1976, thirty-one American universities had set up computer science departments, saving a total of \$150m on visual teaching programmes. And, wherever computer-aided instruction enlivens the syllabus, the scientists may have time to doodle, or they can afford to let animators play with their machines. From the films shown at the conference, it did not appear that they have achieved the breakthrough into art, though some of the designers are almost there. The more serious problem is that in Britain education bud-

gets are being reduced, and this hardly seems the time to persuade the authorities into large-scale investment, whatever the ultimate savings might be.

None the less, animators and film-makers can still find access to computers if they try hard enough. After all, Stan Hayward converted the Mechanical Engineering staff at Imperial College. They are helping his current project to set up a data bank for animation, for use by both film-makers and buyers. With the storage and retrieval capacity of even a small computer system, an information network, a labour and film exchange, and a set of permanent records could be provided at the same time, in the same operation.

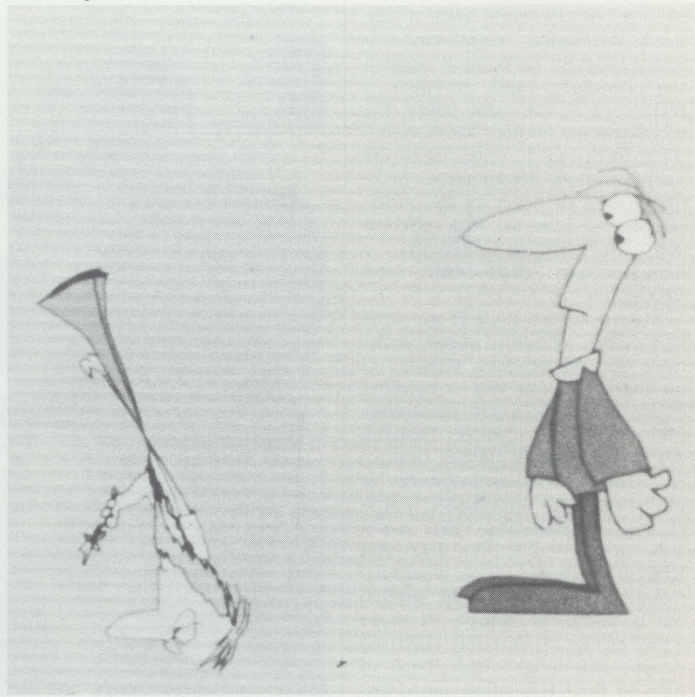
There are problems about finding money for such projects, since film matters and computer research belong to two different government departments. Colleges and universities, like Imperial College, might help bridge the gap, as of course might private enterprise. If only the computer firms could be persuaded of the importance and publicity value of the film industry, the big companies could, for educational returns or for prestige, subsidise the imaginative use of computers in the media. If...

MARI KUTTNA

The Other Mitterrand

Merely to leaf through *Pariscope*, the French equivalent of *Time Out*, must bring tears to the eyes of a *cinéophile* based in London. But let him not get carried away. He should know that most of the hundred odd revivals classified in its pages under *comédie dramatique*, *drame psychologique* and so on (categories relevant enough to French cinema but curiously unrewarding where any other is concerned) are just those of the

Stan Hayward's 'The Mathematician'



month, or even week, before, slightly reshuffled. That Studio Action, for instance, a veritable V. and A. of *américainoiserie*, has cycled and recycled *ad nauseam* the same exclusive Pantheon of Hollywood directors.

However, Paris is still—to my knowledge—the only place where it is possible to see Pasolini's *Salò* (at the Pagode, the city's prettiest cinema, whose rococo splendour was chosen precisely, or so I like to think, as a deterrent against right-wing bomb attacks); where another cinema, the above-mentioned Studio Action, would actually bother to stage a revival of the Elizabeth Taylor *Cleopatra* in its hitherto unseen *version intégrale* (containing snippets, it is rumoured, of Mamoulian's work); and where no one need rush to catch as esoteric a film as Marguerite Duras' *Son Nom de Venise dans Calcutta Désert*, it having already enjoyed a run of several months with no end in sight. And only in Paris is Frédéric Mitterrand's Olympic complex at all conceivable.

Nephew of the François Mitterrand who rallied the Left and almost defeated Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in the Presidential elections of 1974, Frédéric was, by his own account, a typical product of the *haute bourgeoisie* until he experienced a scarcely less typical crisis of conscience, but which, in his case, did not take on a directly political coloration. Instead, in 1970, with his own and friends' money, he bought a dilapidated theatre in working-class Montparnasse and converted it into a lively repertory cinema of the type that shows a different film every day. Soon a second, smaller auditorium was built into the Olympic to première films by Schroeter, Syberberg, Yoshida and the like (or unlike), all of which might otherwise have failed to find a distributor.

The success of the Olympic assured (or so it must have seemed), Mitterrand proceeded to buy, in the same area, a disused warehouse, transformed it into a spacious three-pack cinema, the Entrepôt, and installed a restaurant of the same name (the word means simply 'warehouse'). This week, as I write, there are no fewer than fifteen films showing in one or other of his *salles*: seasons of Brando, Jack Nicholson and Italian comedy, a documentary double-bill and *Winstanley*.

Mitterrand has himself appeared in a couple of films, posed in the nude for an opulent volume of photographs, and was a member of the French selection committee for last year's Cannes Festival. About his noisy departure from it, to protest the atmosphere of philistine (and mercantile) satisfaction surrounding the event and, in particular, the fact that Rivette's *Duelle* was excluded from the competition, he prefers not to comment. Simply, 'I made a fool of myself, and only alienated people who might have been of help to me.' His whole *tout-Paris*

period, he feels, is at an end, and this he does not regret. 'I won't deny I enjoyed it thoroughly, but it's like having a famous name—my own, to look no further—it's only useful if you're riding a wave of success. When things go less well, it's just another stick to beat you with.'

On the evening I spoke to him, the Olympic had attracted a mere handful of paying customers. The reasons for this are not hard to find. Neither cinema is very conveniently got at by the kind of Latin Quarter audience that alone will keep an *art et essai* house in business (but, he insists, it was precisely from the Latin Quarter, where new cinemas seem to open with greater frequency than new films, that he wished to escape). There have been complaints about erratic projection (but Paris projectionists are as weird a race as its taxi-drivers, and the problem is universal). The repertory system makes transport prohibitively expensive, programming a nightmare. 'Try running a three-star restaurant on a canteen budget. With the best will in the world, something is bound to suffer. Well, I'd rather it were the service.' But the most serious embarrassment is caused by his increasingly uneasy relations with film companies and distributors. 'I'm almost the last of the independents in Paris. The large companies—the Americans, in particular—are absolutely indifferent to the kind of range I try to offer and, in fact, to the whole notion of showing films again whose first-run careers are over, especially if they weren't a great success. In some cases the reaction has been, quite simply, to burn the copies.'

Mitterrand admits to liking the idea of cinemas with an 'image'—political for the 14 Juillet, *fantastique* for the Styx—but, judging such a fondness for order excessive and even 'fascist', has turned it

inside out by refusing to privilege any genre whatsoever. Retrospectives of Martine Carol and Jean Gabin (*before* the latter's death), all-night sessions of hardcore pornography, seasons of Ozu, Mattarazzo and Arab musicals, 1900 and a new Torre Nilsson that passed unnoticed at Cannes—nothing on celluloid, one might say, is alien to him. Which is why, in a period of galloping conformity, it is important for the health of this city that cinemas like the Olympic and Entrepôt, resembling nothing so much as the second-hand bookstalls that border the Seine, should remain, in both senses of the word, open.

GILBERT ADAIR

Budapest

'Don't you feel,' Hungarian friends and film-makers ask anxiously, 'that the standard has fallen dreadfully?' And you are obliged to reassure them that it has not. It's true that Jancsó, now spending most of his time in Italy, has not provided Hungary with a star turn in the two years since *Elektreia*; that the euphoria of the early 70s when Hungarian films seemed to be walking off with prizes at every international film festival seems to have abated for the moment; that everyone has his own gripes about the production set-up (what film-maker, anywhere in the world, has not?); but the Budapest climate still seems remarkably favourable to film-making.

What other national production, indeed, could with confidence invite a hundred foreign critics and distributors to view the past year's entire production—a score of films—in the course of a week, as the Hungarians do annually, alternately in Pécs and Budapest. Amazingly, even the worst of the films—dutiful war dramas or

literal literary adaptations—are sufferable; and this year produced at least half a dozen films that were outstanding, or good, or at least worth talking about.

In *Budapest Tales*, István Szabó pursues his preoccupation with the popular sentiments underlying the history of his own times (he was born in 1939). Here he develops one metaphor. In the aftermath of the Second World War, a ragged company emerge from the woods and hills, and come upon an abandoned tram by the riverside. They right it, get it on its rails, and decide to load all their chattels into it and push, in the hope that the line will lead to the City. Years go by; there are births and deaths; quarrels and crises. The reception of the film seemed to suffer from the audience's eagerness to put more precise readings on the incidents and characters than Szabó intended. Budapest, incidentally, never appears in the film; but a short which Szabó has finished subsequently, *Map of Budapest*, a highly charged impressionist collage of several generations of the city's life and history, is certainly the finest summation to date of his very personal and poetic response to history.

Márta Mézsáros, too, has achieved a peak of her career with *Nine Months*, a portrait of a dogged girl fighting it out in a man's world and finally going it alone as an unwed mother, after rejecting the men whose demands on her seem too great and too selfish. The role is played by Lili Monori, the girl in Zolt Kézdi-Kovács' *When Joseph Returns*, who actually bore her own child for the final astonishing moments of the film. *Nine Months* is a film which arouses a good deal of hostility; and a man was observed leaving Mézsáros' press conference, dragging his reluctant wife by the hand and loudly protesting against feminism.

Michael Graham and Raul Giménez in Edgardo Cozarinsky's new film 'Les Apprentis Sorciers'



The Sword, by a new director, János Domolyi, represents a familiar mid-European style in satire: it is the story of a man who finds an historic Hungarian relic in Vienna, idealistically and patriotically sells his car to buy it—and then finds himself strangled in a web of bureaucracy which has little sympathy for his altruism. János Rózsa's *Spider Football*, a funny, high-pitched satirical farce set in an ineptly run school, ultimately perhaps explores more profoundly its very universal theme about the quality of teachers and their relations with the children.

The technical skill of Hungarian cameramen always commands admiration; but in 1976 Elemér Ragályi has emerged as a cinematographer of quite outstanding versatility, ranging from the stark *cinéma vérité* of Judit Elek's *A Simple Story*, to the catch-as-catch-can frenzy of *Spider Football*, or the exquisite atmospherics of Pál Sándor's *Souvenir of Hercules Spa*. This is a dazzling but somewhat inconsequential *jeu* about a young political fugitive of 1919 obliged to seek refuge, disguised as a female nurse, in a spa.

Elek's *A Simple Story* is one of two exceptional documentaries, neither actually part of the 1976 production, which were on show in Budapest during the week. It is a devastating account of the horizon-less lives of two girls in a remote Hungarian village. Imre Gyöngyössi and Barna Kabay's *Is This the Earth?* is a contrasted but no less truthful account of a rural life—an old woman who has somehow preserved the total adjustment to life and the land which she has inherited from generations. It is at once a remarkable ethnographical study of a way of life that cannot survive our generation, and an awe-inspiring model of life as it should be lived.

DAVID ROBINSON

Oxford Festival

'We do hope we have provided some alternative to the fodder reeking with sex and violence on which so much of modern cinema feeds.' With these Savonarola-like words Oxford introduced its First International Film Festival. The sentence was from the Festival's programme booklet, and although I'm not sure that the ills of modern cinema have been wholly precipitated by a surfeit of sex and violence—in this country at least the censor keeps us on a fairly strict diet of both—one welcomes with relief any regional challenge to the ever more corpulent sway of the major distribution chains. As the Oxford amusements guide showed on my brief weekend visit there, not even the groves of Academe are safe from the pollution of the *Sweeneys* and *Vanessas* of this world; and apart from the University Film Society and an eccentric movie establishment called the Penultimate Picture Palace (which I didn't visit but gather to be much like the Electric



István Szabó's 'Budapest Tales'

Cinema), there has been precious little hitherto to challenge the rule of the circuits in this city until the Oxford Film Festival started up this year.

Or, to be more precise, last year. The event had a little publicised trial run last summer, but this year it was bigger and earlier, hoping to catch both university students and national film critics at home. And although one must be politely sceptical about the Festival's claims that in ten years it will rival Cannes, some international prestige was lent the event this year by the flown-in presence of several distinguished foreign journalists and directors. (Marco Bellocchio was guest of honour at the press lunch I attended.)

The Festival's programme, furthermore, was more noteworthy than the conspiracy of silence it received from our national critics would indicate. I cannot believe that the British premières of films like Bellocchio's *Victory March*, Chabrol's *Alice* (also seen in the NFT's recent French season), Schlöndorff's *Coup de Grace*, or Truffaut's *Story of Adèle H.* (two years old, but still at the time of writing without a public screening in England) deserve to pass by totally unheralded in the British press. Part of the blame for this must be laid at the door of the Festival organisers themselves. With the help of Messrs. Pernod they had thrown a cocktail party in London at the beginning of February, but cocktail parties are no substitute for press shows, and to have shown at least one of their offerings to London critics before the Festival began would have provided a publicity boost.

Clearly, though, the Oxford Festival can and must rely to a great extent on local support, especially from the university. While film courses proliferate among our other universities, there is still no official academic recognition of cinema as a subject in

either Oxford or Cambridge. But if education, like nature, abhors a vacuum, it cannot be long before this omission is repaired; and meanwhile the Festival can not only profit from the empty stomachs of cinematically deprived students but can also whet their appetite for a future interest in film as a legitimate field of study.

In addition to a stalwart contingent of new foreign films, the Festival's programme boasted an appealing line in throwaway special events: a brief tribute to Jean Harlow (40 years dead this year), a quartet of films devoted to 'The Performing Arts on Screen' (movie versions of Shakespeare, Verdi, Synge, Ibsen) and a collection of films gathered together under the engagingly sly title 'Hollywood: Heyday and Decline', Robert Altman, Peter Bogdanovich and Michael Winner being among the directors chosen to wonder nervously which category they qualified for.

If some of these events had a shoestring air about them, one should at least allow the Festival the excuse of early days and budgetary difficulties and, according to organiser Phillip Bergson, some formidably uncooperative behaviour from the major distributors. Bergson was promised *Cross of Iron* for Oxford as a British première, only for EMI to open it in London a week before the Festival. *Nickelodeon* was likewise offered to them as a British 'first', only to be withdrawn when Bogdanovich's film became the choice for a Royal Première. Not that, in the final reckoning, the Oxford Festival needed all these excuses. If the 1978 Festival is as substantial an advance on the 1977 model as the latter was on its predecessor, and if that geometrical progression is kept up over the next few years, the London Film Festival could find, by the 1980s, that it has to look to its laurels.

NIGEL ANDREWS

BFI Award 1976

The British Film Institute Award for 1976 has been made to Nagisa Oshima's *Empire of the Senses* (*Ai no Corrida*, also known as *Realm of the Senses*); the award, as each year, goes to 'the most original and imaginative film introduced at the National Film Theatre.' *Empire of the Senses* is undoubtedly Oshima's most controversial work. It enjoyed a *succès de scandale* at Cannes, was unprecedentedly seized by the Berlin authorities after a single festival screening, and has drawn radically divided critical responses. *SIGHT AND SOUND* reports from last year's festivals demonstrated the divide. Richard Roud, from Cannes, complained that 'distinguished director or no, non-stop sex is a terrible bore,' but allowed that 'there were many who found the film both profound and moving, so mine is something of a minority report.' Richard Combs, from Berlin, saw 'a strangely intense yet allusive political commentary,' which in the historical context of a real-life event in 1930s Tokyo showed the 'self-immolation of masculine codes of dominance . . . before the onslaught of female sexuality.' *Empire of the Senses* has been acquired by a British distributor, but at the time of writing has still to be cleared by the Customs before an application can be made for a censor's certificate.

The Special Award for 1976 went to John Cassavetes, whose association with the NFT dates back to 1960, when the Theatre introduced *Shadows* to British audiences. In 1976 his *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* was a London Festival entry, and was warmly reviewed by Richard Combs in *SIGHT AND SOUND* as 'Cassavetes' most infuriating, unclassifiable and intriguing project to date'—a black thriller, about a Los Angeles strip club owner's involvement with the Syndicate, subjected to Cassavetes' 'total involvement'.

THE TWO-EYED FILM COMES BACK



Charles W. Smith F.R.P.S.

Will the stereoscopic film come to stay, the next time round? The Stereo 70 system, developed in Moscow by the U.S.S.R. National Institute of Cinematograph Research (NIKFI), is now being shown to the public in Eastern Europe; the films have already been shown in twenty cities in East Germany.

The fascinations of the 3-D film image have long been known, and the Patent Office files are littered with the brainstormings of a hundred impractical inventors. Even before the Lumière brothers gave their first movie show in 1895, Friese-Greene had built a stereoscopic camera. This beautifully built mahogany instrument, doomed to failure because of its use of unsprocketed film and images as large as the old glass lantern-slides, now lies forlornly in a case in the

A clip of Stereo 70 positive film, showing the twin stereoscopic images side by side

Science Museum. Films in depth have been put before the public intermittently, at intervals, and with improving technical quality, ever since the first showings of Plastigrams in New York in 1921. Always, they have had a sensational short-term success, and then disappeared.

But all those who have made stereo films know the fresh challenge of creating a space image, a film that doesn't just lie on the surface of a screen, but extends through it to infinity in the far distance, and in front of it as close to the spectator as the director wishes. And all know without doubt that one day the three-dimensional film will be universal. For man is a two-eyed animal; other things being equal, and when technical processes permit, a two-eyed film that makes possible the perception of depth will always be preferred to the shadow-play visualisa-

tions of a one-eyed camera. There can be no doubt of this; for the depth-image is the general case, and the flat film we know at present is the special case. In the depth-film it is still possible to produce a flat image, when the director wishes to for particular effect, just as in a colour film it is possible to produce black-and-white images.

Progress in the cinema goes in bursts. Expenditure on new equipment has to be amortised over a period, before the profits start to roll in freely. The last 3-D boom was in 1953; over sixty Hollywood 3-D features were made in that year, nearly all low-budget, low-quality films, often remakes of scripts lifted off the shelf. The box-office returns very rapidly slumped; and the cinemas re-equipped with anamorphic lenses, wide screens and magnetic sound systems.

There seem to have been two principal causes for the collapse of the 1953 3-D boom. First, the films just weren't good enough, either in content or in technical quality. Studios rushed into production without real knowledge of the technical requirements, with lash-up equipment, and with the simple aim of turning a quick buck by getting their film into the theatres ahead of the opposition; many didn't even bother to study the lessons to be learned from the pioneering programme of British films produced for the Telecinema at the 1951 Festival of Britain Exhibition and after, which sparked off the boom. Secondly, the additional complexity of the projection technique, with the need for twin synchronised projectors in the system used at that time, caused headaches for the projection staff; and also, it must be admitted, headaches for the customers when the films were badly projected. The additional chore of handling the polaroid viewers was not popular with theatre managers. The rival ultra-wide-screen processes, such as Cinema-Scope, which appeared at the same time, presented fewer problems and therefore made more appeal to managements.

Since 1953, new generations of cinema-goers have never seen 3-D. The time seems ripe for a new trial, which we must hope will be handled in a less short-sighted way than last time. The record shows clearly enough that audiences will pay once or twice to see an optical novelty; but that gimmick value does not replace the classic entertainment and artistic values of drama, humour and sex interest, of script quality, acting and general production values.

Stereo 70

There is one great difference with the Russian Stereo 70 system, and this is that it is the first 3-D process to be launched with adequate financial backing and technical support. The system is so straightforward and satisfactory that it seems very likely it will be copied in the West; it is the latest stage in over thirty years of stereoscopic film-making, and all the optical problems have been solved during this long development.

The first stereoscopic feature film was the famous *Robinson Crusoe*, directed by Alexander Andrievsky and shown in Moscow in 1947 to reopen their Stereocinema after the wartime closure. The great technical achievement of that time was the optical

raster screen, invented by Semyon Ivanov, which permitted stereoscopic viewing without any polarising spectacles or other viewing device. The camera system used for *Crusoe* was a rather makeshift affair involving side-by-side images on special film, produced by photographing into a dual mirror mounted in front of a single-lens camera. This was not capable of producing first-class results, for the light paths of the two images were dissimilar, and it was rapidly abandoned.

It was replaced by a much more satisfactory process in which the simultaneously exposed left- and right-eye films were diverted by a prism system into alternate positions on standard 35mm film. This process was capable of first-class optical quality, though it necessitated new camera, sound-recording and projector mechanisms, capable of transporting a double-frame 24 times a second. Fifteen or twenty films were produced in this system, and are still shown in repertory in the few small theatres equipped with Ivanov screens.

The development of the new Stereo 70 process has been carried out at NIKFI in Moscow under the direction of A. G. Boltyansky, himself a cameraman who photographed two of the earlier 3-D features, *Aleko* (1953) and *The White Poodle* (1955). The basic thinking behind Stereo 70 has been to make use of the 70mm projectors which have now been installed in many Soviet cinemas (as they have in Britain and the United States). These massive and expensive projectors are inclined to be under-employed because of the shortage of 70mm product. Even in the United States 70mm films have virtually ceased to be produced because of the rising costs of colour stocks, and also the greatly improved quality of modern 35mm film, which now equals the quality that could formerly only be achieved on 70mm.

At NIKFI it was realised that the availability of 70mm cameras made it possible for twin stereoscopic pictures of 35mm size to be imprinted side-by-side on the film, instead of one after the other. This meant that standard camera and projector mechanisms could be used, instead of the dual-transport mechanisms previously required, and at once opened up the possibility of more widespread distribution of the films. At the same time there was room for six magnetic sound tracks, which are used for stereophonic recording to accompany the stereoscopic picture. The layout of the images is shown in the illustration.

The use of standard camera bodies means that the Russians have four kinds of camera available for shooting Stereo 70 films: a standard silenced studio camera, a mirror-shutter camera for general purpose and location work, a high-speed camera for special effects, and a very compact hand-held model for use in difficult locations such as car interiors.

The adaptations required for shooting stereo are the fitting of twin lenses of small dimensions in place of the single 70mm objectives, and binocular eyepieces so the operator can view the scene in stereo. The basic separation between the lenses is fixed at 26mm, which is convenient for shooting medium to close shots. For more distant scenes, prismatic front attachments provide variable separation up to the normal human

interocular distance of about 65mm. For extreme close-ups a new attachment incorporating a semi-reflector has been developed which provides for reduced separations, right down to zero.

Modifications required to the projector for stereo use are merely the fitting of a stereo aperture-plate in the gate, and replacing the standard lens by a dual-lens unit; so there is no difficulty in mixing Stereo 70 films with standard 70mm wide-screen films at the same theatre. The same projectors, and prints, may be used for two modes of stereo projection: either on the Ivanov optical raster screen, available in sizes up to 4 metres maximum, when no viewing glasses are required, or projection by polarised light, when polarising viewers need to be worn.

The advantages of using a single film and projector (in place of the dual system used in the West in 1951-53) are obvious: simpler operating procedures, no possibility of errors of synchronism between films, and no relative unsteadiness between the two images.

The major problem with polarised projection has always been loss of light in the polarising filters, often resulting in pictures of blatantly sub-standard brightness; here there is an obvious disadvantage in having only one lamphouse instead of two. However, by forcing the maximum possible amperage through the powerful arcs of the 70mm projectors, the Russian engineers have managed to produce well-illuminated pictures in sizes up to 10 metres.

Polarised projection is regarded in Moscow as only a temporary expedient. Work is now proceeding on the production of 'deep hologram' viewing-screens with properties of selective reflection which will eliminate the loss of light and also the need for viewing spectacles. These hologram screens have been judged as more suitable for development in large sizes than the optical raster screen. So after 30 years Ivanov's great invention seems to have become obsolete, at least for large audiences—and before the principle has even been demonstrated in Britain or the United States!

So far, seven Stereo 70 films have been completed. At a recent international technical conference in Moscow, delegates were shown a special sample-reel consisting of selected sequences. Brightly lit on the 10-metre screen, sharp and rock-steady, this show was a technical *tour de force* which literally brought a new dimension in cinema-going to most of the audience of film-makers. Some of the scenes were circus and music-hall subjects, with whirling torches and flying Indian clubs; but more impressive to my mind were straightforward shots of scenic views, and of people who looked like people and not the flat shadow-show figures we have become accustomed to. A simple close-up of a bunch of black grapes hanging on a vine, beautifully photographed to show the bloom on the rounded surfaces, brought a gasp of astonishment from the audience. An underwater sequence was particularly effective as compared with normal flat filming, with the fish imaged wheeling and gently hovering in watery space, above the heads of the audience in rows nearer the screen. The stereophonic music recording

was throughout of exceptional quality.

I took the opportunity of going to a public performance at the 400-seat Oktober Cinema of the most recent Stereo 70 film, *SOS Nad Taigai* (*S.O.S. Over the Forest*). This is a modest outdoor adventure, quite free from 3-D gimmicks and certainly not a blockbuster film with a blockbuster budget. Shot in the mountainous forests of the North Caucasus, it is a story of two woodcutters or hunters who part company after a quarrel. One man returns alone to civilisation, but the second does not reappear. Rumours lead to the first man being arrested on suspicion of having murdered his companion. However, he escapes from custody, realises that his best chance of establishing his innocence lies in discovering what happened to his friend, and heads off back to the mountains. An extended two-level chase ensues, with the mountain police pursuing the hunter, who is pursuing his friend.

The physical hazards of the forest jungle, the taiga of the title, are well conveyed; particularly striking was a sequence of the hunter crawling across a log bridge, high above a ravine, which of course collapses at the critical moment. Here the sensation of height, of vertigo, was far better conveyed in 3-D than it could have been in a normal film. The characters of the protagonists are well shown in distortion-free facial close-ups, in which use has obviously been made of the new 'zero-separation' lens attachment. At the end, the exhausted hunter discovers his friend lying injured, just as his pursuers are on the point of seizing him. The final shots are of a rescue helicopter flitting away like a moth against the vast wastes of forest-covered hillsides.

The Stereo 70 programme is being launched as an attempt to incorporate 3-D films into the everyday pattern of cinema-going, instead of their being publicised as exceptional stunt productions. In fact on the posters, with very limited knowledge of the language, it was difficult to discover any reference to the film being stereoscopic. In the new stereocinemas, 3-D films are shown in alternation with flat films, and the same prices charged. The stereo films are also shown in other cities in flat versions, and notes are kept of audience reactions. First returns show that audience response is substantially more favourable when films are shown in the stereo version. Research also shows that audiences do not object to the polaroid viewers; objections to these in the past came more from cinema managements than from audiences. There seems no doubt that a large-screen picture viewed through polarising spectacles finds more favour than a small-screen picture which can be viewed without spectacles.

The changeover to colour in our cinemas has been completed, so that a black-and-white film is now a rare exception. Is the two-eyed film the next stage? It may be that the much-delayed 3-D revolution will this time come to stay, in the West as well as in the East, given improved technical standards and intelligent productions. But in the end the future of the 3-D film depends on enlisting the enthusiasm of skilled young directors who will be prepared to master the new techniques. ■

André Delvaux in front of decor
by Paul Delvaux.
Photograph: Jean Lemoine

Dan Yakir

an
interview
with

ANDRÉ DELVAUX

André Delvaux made his first feature, *The Man Who Had His Hair Cut Short*, in 1966. He was a relatively late starter, then aged forty. He had studied both law and music; had been a teacher (he still is, at the National Superior Institute of the Entertainment Arts in Brussels); had made documentaries on other film-makers (including Fellini and Jean Rouch) for Belgian television; and, incidentally, had played the piano as accompanist for silent films, as Julien does in *Rendez-vous à Bray*. In the last decade he has made only three more features: *Un Soir, un Train* (1969), *Rendez-vous à Bray* (1971), which was only distributed commercially in Britain last year, and *Belle* (1973), which still has to find a British distributor. His most recent film, *Met Dieric Bouts*, was made last year to celebrate the painter's 500th anniversary.

Delvaux' films all traverse the borderline between reality and imagination. His world, as Tom Milne said in writing about his films for *SIGHT AND SOUND* (Spring, 1972) 'is one of calm bourgeois interiors carved out of the surrounding dark, of utter normality which suddenly finds itself struggling to keep safely within the circle of light.' Delvaux' comment on *Nosferatu* is also perhaps revealing indirectly about himself: 'The admirable thing is that Murnau realised how far a fantasy should use real settings: when *Nosferatu* appears for the first time, it is beneath the arch of a porch that Murnau chose simply because it was there. That is the fantastic thing that grips one. Once the author has caught us in that reality, we have to follow it to the end.'

Where do you think the Belgian cinema is going?

ANDRÉ DELVAUX: At first sight, I would say that it isn't going very far, because most of the films are traditional, in the bad sense of the word. They are simply products that are trying to get into the market. They



have rather provincial subjects. Of course in Belgium there are the two main streams: the Flemish community and the French community. The Flemish community has a very active cinema, but most people work on the most conventional basis. Most of them start from well-known Flemish novels

because this gives them a kind of cultural pretext. Using the bear's skin, they can think they are bears themselves... and they also think they'll get more government money if they are adapting well-known literary subjects. That's why Flemish films are provincial and have great difficulty getting shown outside Belgium.

A few young people are working but we haven't seen many good results, and perhaps this can be explained by the fact that there are no good Flemish film schools. Young people get bad professional backgrounds, except in the field of animation where there is a marvellous school around Raoul Servais. He's probably the major Belgian film-maker, if you don't think in categories. On the Flemish side, there is young Robbe de Hert, who's trying to make personal films with a political background. He invests all of himself in his films but he hasn't yet found a form; he hasn't used up his potential. But the leading Flemish film-maker is probably Harry Kümel, director of *Mr. Hawarden* and *Malpertuis*. He has a solid professional background.

On the French side, there is much less activity, which perhaps corresponds to the fact that the French-speaking part of the country is economically less active. There is Jean-Jacques Andrien, whose film *Le Fils d'Amr est Mort* won first prize at Locarno in 1975. It's a difficult film, very

aesthetic. Will he go towards sheer aestheticism? And there is Chantal Akerman, who made *Jeanne Dielman*, another film which is too experimental to reach a wide public. She was at our school, INSAS, for a year and found it uninteresting. She went her own way, which was right. She is very rigorous, very strict in what she wants and doesn't want, and she works very simply. She's probably the most interesting young film-maker in Belgium.

How about French cinema? Do you see new trends of any significance there?

For me, the most interesting trends are rather traditional, though completely outside normal production. At the top, I would place Marguerite Duras. I think *India Song* is a masterpiece; it's at the peak of a line that runs from *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*, through her own films, to something that is now perfect in that style. But, of course, she is alone. I don't appreciate the younger film people in France. They are fussy and they want to be 'original authors'; which, I think, is a nuisance. They have an inborn contempt for perfection, and they usually borrow from the American cinema things that are not interesting. Perhaps all this is linked with the political situation in France—it is blocked to the right, and the traditional production system in France doesn't function well. But there are many young film-makers in France whom I don't know, simply because when I hear what they are talking about I feel no curiosity as to how they do it.

How about directors perhaps from another generation, who might seem closer to you? Bresson? Franju?

Bresson—that's finished. He's an old man. Some people die while in their strength, others go on living. Franju has been working less in recent years, doing more for TV and making things with less force. He was great some years ago, but for me he also belongs to the past. But we haven't spoken about the last Visconti or about Bergman, who is the greatest. *Death in Venice* to my mind is a masterpiece, and at the same time it's very simple. Visconti wasn't afraid of using the romantic trend in music and image.

In what category would you choose to classify your own films? Words like 'surrealism' and 'fable' come to mind...

It's something of a psychoanalytical test... I never invented any category myself, I simply learnt it from other people. Surrealism? Perhaps there are surrealist elements, but people don't agree about what surrealism is. So, is it surrealism in the Belgian fashion—just as you find it in Magritte, or in some way in Paul Delvaux? Maybe not. Then my work was said to be related to the world of fantastic films. What does that mean? The fantastic film has quite another connotation: films about the future, about strange situations and strange people. And of course that has nothing to do with my films, in which the situations and people are apparently normal. Perhaps it might be better to look in the direction of romanticism, the romanticism of the imagination, because the world of the imagination has more importance there than the real world. There is no commitment in it to political reality, to the reality of facts. My films are rather concerned with the mixture of dream and reality that's inside

everyone. And I think that they look like my country in some way. I was nourished by my country. Everything I can invent is really not invented; it's memories of things I've known, of people and situations I've experienced. It's a work of imagination on past reality, on actual reality for me.

What impact do you hope to achieve with the films?

People don't make films just to sell them, except when they're making pornography. I make films for the hypothetical second person, for anyone who might respond to them, and I suppose there are many people who could. And at the same time, I make them for myself. I don't think they would speak to huge audiences, but to enough people to allow me to continue to make films. I'm satisfied with the impact of my work on intellectuals; I'd like to speak to wider audiences, but I won't change anything to get people to come to the theatre. I have confidence in my work. If I didn't—I wouldn't work.

How do you see the relationship between film, on the one hand, and the other media—literature, painting, music?

Personally, I relate film much more closely to music than to narrative literature, because I discovered that the structure of a film can be the same as the structure of music. It's a matter of balance, of repeatedly using the same kind of material to compose, to build up a time sequence—which can be an hour and a half long—as one does in a sonata or a rondo form. Of course, you can find that on the surface the narrative is the same as in many novels, because the films tell stories. But if you look at the structure of the stories, you find that they are very elaborate in the novel while quite simple in film. Musical structures are simple even in classical but difficult works like *The Rite of Spring*. There's unity in the way the elements are used and put together to compose the whole. And an interesting film doesn't start with telling a story but with an idea of some structures inside such a story. The most important thing in film is its language and structure; out of this emerges a significance related to something which is just like a certain reality, but isn't that. I would say that I came very close to a musical structure in *Rendez-vous à Bray*, and closer still in my new film, *Met Dieric Bouts*.

The new film was made for Flemish television, like *The Man Who Had His Hair Cut Short*. They asked me to make a film about the painter Dieric (Dirk) Bouts, for his 500th anniversary. We don't know anything about him, except his works. And I thought of a way to combine his paintings, not as a subject but rather as themes, with other themes I would find in nature, around where I was born and where my people are buried and where Bouts had lived. I thought I found a way to speak about my people and my country, by way of homage, and to make a reflection on life and death. The themes you find in my other films are repeated here, though not in fiction form. It's a half-hour film entirely made up of associative elements, associations between details of the painter's work, landscapes, people, sounds, images. The structure is musical because there is no narrative. I think it represents very

accurately the spirit of my Flemish country. But it's rather a difficult film, unless you respond to it simply in terms of sensibility. Then things come easily, because the only principle of editing is association. It's never logical.

You've mentioned film language. In a *Cahiers du Cinéma* interview, you once said that film should be dealt with as a whole. One should start from the overall rhythm and the interdependence of the main sequences rather than from details. Yet there's so much close attention to detail in your films.

Yes, but it doesn't stop with the detail. It stops with the global structure, and then every part is worked up to the detail, which is always related to the wider structure. I never go about working on detail the way a man works on a necklace. It's much more like a kind of puzzle, in which every small piece has its place. I try to use every piece within the puzzle many times, so that my whole material becomes unified and there are no pieces that simply go off at tangents. (Delvaux goes on to show how he works, placing bits of paper, each containing a sequence, on the table.) I'm writing the whole film in this way—in 35 sequences—but I don't know how they'll be used. I know exactly the meaning and the content of every sequence, and I could now classify them chronologically or by characters or by seasons—there's a house, a garden, trees—or by places. But in some way I will find links between sequences, namely the associative process between them, so that they will start forming a figure. If I start the right way, the figure will be complete after a while and I won't have any chronological problems. Of course there won't be any ellipses, because I won't need them. I'll simply have motifs, and when they are perfectly related to each other, I won't be able to suppress a sequence without losing something and I won't need to add anything. It will be complete, and I will shoot the film in that way. There's never anything intellectual about the material I work on—people and places—except that the whole thing is completely intellectual. It comes entirely out of the mind. Von Sternberg said that even sensibility expresses itself through the brain. To use all of these elements as a musician uses his themes, variations and tones...

What are you working on now?

The starting point is that I wanted to speak with a writer, of my own age, about my adolescence and my youth and the people I knew in French Belgium during the war, between 1939 and 1950. The film will have an autobiographical texture, and for the first time I'm not using imaginary situations: it's closer to a real, solid past.

You write your own scripts: your first three films were based on literary sources, and *Belle* was an original script. What do you look for when you go to a literary source?

I chose *The Man Who Had His Hair Cut Short* because I liked the novel. I had to choose a subject with some cultural impact. I hadn't made any films then, and people wouldn't have wanted me to write my own subject. Anyhow, I'd had no experience and I didn't intend to write. So I chose a novel which I liked very much both for its



'A distant look at women . . . ' Adriana Bogdan in 'Belle'

content and its form. Later I took another short story by the same author, Johan Daisne, because I liked that kind of approach, and I wrote the script myself. That was *Un Soir, un Train*. Then I worked on some problems I hadn't solved in the first two films, and that became an original script—*Belle*. That was written in 1968, though the film wasn't made until much later. I tried to find a form which wouldn't suffer from the same difficulties, or have the same effects, as *The Man Who Had His Hair Cut Short* and *Un Soir, un Train*; I wanted to come closer to a kind of reality where you couldn't tell if it is real or a dream, where imagination and reality are just the same. Then I made *Rendez-vous à Bray*. I chose the story by Julien Gracq because it's a very simple story with a lot of charm, and a kind of mystery that is bound up with his style. I made a film

with a completely musical composition—which was not in the original. I composed it like a kind of rondo: it has the form of A, B, A, C, A, D, A, E and so on. All the A elements, the main theme, refer to Julien, the leading character. All the rest are variations near or far from the main theme, but always coming back to it. I'm working in another way now, looking for structures I haven't yet found. I don't know what kind of a musical association it will be. It's not so important whether a film has an original script or not. When you take a script based on a novel, that novel exists—you can judge it, which saves you a lot of time.

About painting. You mentioned Magritte and Delvaux. Could you say what you got from each of them—and perhaps from others?

Maybe, though I'm obviously not aware of all the influences. What I found in

Magritte is the way he uses real elements, put together in an illogical way. In 'The Empire of Lights' there's a house on a canal and there are lights; there are trees over the house and it's night, but the sky is a full-day sky. That kind of thing works very well provided that every piece of reality is really real. I thought one could do that with a film. We are working with reality—a street is a street, a face is a face—and perhaps we can find a structure where things are illogically juxtaposed in time, the way Magritte juxtaposes objects in space. As for Delvaux, it's the use of mystery, of settings I know well, old places with much charm, where people live as if they weren't there.

In all your films, beauty is expressed as something extremely important, the supreme obsession. Do you think beauty can provide enough support for those who find in the quest for it their only reason to live?

Not beauty in itself. But if beauty is combined with death, with risk, then yes. One should bear in mind that death is always present, that a beautiful man or woman is always closely linked to decay. Beauty in itself has no temporality, but if you relate beauty to time then you have the idea of decay. This combination of beauty and death has been a theme for painters like Breughel and Bosch and poets like Rilke; it has always been there in Flemish literature, and it's present in much of the French painting. When beauty acquires the dimension of death, it becomes very strong. . . . Beauty and decay: it's the theme of *The Man Who Had His Hair Cut Short* and of *Met Dieric Bouts*.

Beauty in your films always seems to be associated with mystery: the women are there to be stared at rather than communicated with.

The film's point of view is always that of a central character, who is a man. I feel that I'm closer to the psychology of men than of women, and that's why in my films we are closer to the male characters and we always have a distant look at women.

In *Rendez-vous à Bray* the theme of love and beauty gets another dimension—that of male friendship. There is a scene where both men bathe nude in the river and the woman (Bulle Ogier) lags behind. She's almost unnecessary because they have such complete understanding . . .

She is as necessary as a piece of lemon in Schweppes tonic. I wanted to show two men who like each other, who complement each other, who had an understanding between them which didn't extend to homosexuality, but into which a woman couldn't force herself. So she remains on the surface of that relationship. She's there as a kind of incentive, she pushes things. She is necessary because the two men can work together, each using her for or against the other, as a kind of manipulation. They have a way of sharing her; and of course she is always left out in some way.

You have said that there's always a passage in your films from the real to the imaginary, from reality to dream, from the exterior to the interior. Why is it a recurring pattern, and by what technical means do you bring it about?

Why, I don't know. Of course it's a recurring theme, but if a bluebird has blue

'The dimension of death . . . ' Govert (Senne Rouffaer, left) attends the autopsy in 'The Man Who Had His Hair Cut Short'



feathers, it can't tell you why they are always blue. As to how it is brought about, I'm always looking for new ways of combining real and imaginary elements. Reality and imagination are not two separate categories.

In *The Man Who Had His Hair Cut Short*, you never know whether or not Govert killed Fran. In *Un Soir, un Train*, on the other hand, we can tell where the dream begins and where reality ends. How do you decide whether to blur or disclose the boundary line?

The line was left vague in *The Man Who Had His Hair Cut Short* because I kept close to the novel. In the book, we know from the outset that the man lives in a psychiatric asylum, which is not the case in the film; in the novel the story is told by the man, and in the film it's told by myself. . . . It's not the same. In *Un Soir, un Train*, I tried an A, B structure: one part could simply be reality and the other, let's say, imagination. All elements in the inner world would be fed by elements from reality. So, there would be something like permanent rhymes between the two parts. When you see the imaginary part, you would remember that you have already seen it. It's an idea of structure. In *Belle*, it goes AB, A₁B₁, A₂B₂, A₃B₃, etc. For every A there would somewhere be a corresponding B—but not logically. The imaginary can introduce things that haven't yet taken place but will happen in reality later on; as in music you can announce a theme without giving it.

The motive of a journey appears in all your films; most obviously, of course, in *Un Soir, un Train* . . .

It's been a good theme for many films. Once you start on a journey, you are confined to a boat or a train or a car and you can't get out; you're going somewhere, but you'll never know exactly where, and things happen during the journey and you can't escape them. Psychologically, the journey creates tension. It can be a sexual theme. A journey to death is something very strong, especially when people who go on that journey don't know about it. It's a recurring theme: people fleeing from death without knowing that they are precisely going to meet death at the end of the journey.

Would you say that in your style the intellectual controls the emotional?

I can't stand the pure indication of the unconscious without any control. That's why I can't stand the later films of Ken Russell. I have a feeling for restraint rather than for total expansion; which may have to do with the French-speaking part of me.

What's the function of all the rituals of eating, drinking and so on in your films?

I think those rituals are essential to our lives; everyone has his own rituals in his own social class. And they are very strong because they are immediately recognisable; they give you a firm grasp on reality when you are inside imagination. Respecting those rituals is a characteristic of the middle class people that I'm usually describing. And then, I like to see people in their daily activities—eating, sleeping, getting up. . . .

Do you see your films as making a social comment? I'm thinking about



'Everyone has his own rituals . . . ' The wedding party in 'Belle'

scenes like the writer talking about his daughter's long-haired friend in *Belle*; or the high society in *Rendez-vous à Bray*, where Bulle Ogier feels out of place . . .

Yes, it's the social opposition between Julien and Jacques in *Rendez-vous à Bray*, and the way people behave in *The Man Who Had His Hair Cut Short*. I think I give an accurate description of middle class people I know very well, perhaps the most accurate description of that class given in my country. I'm always critical, either slightly or strongly; I try to tackle the situation of man as a social being. You are made to understand a couple of political opinions, but the film never goes towards a political affirmation of those ideas. No more than Bergman or Fellini do. It's a fashion now to make directly political films, but I feel that in that way people lose their grip on the film. It doesn't pass through the frame of the heart.

In *The Man Who Had His Hair Cut Short*, Fran says that 'A man can satisfy his desires without ever quenching them.' That is true about most of your characters. Are your heroes always bound to be disappointed in their obsessions?

It's a romantic element. They can never go to the limit of things . . . But they are not exactly my heroes; they are the heroes of the novelist, and they say this in the novel. Of course, it belongs to the subject.

Are they bound to compromise? You do offer alternatives. In *The Man Who Had His Hair Cut Short*, Govert realises that he should have stayed at home and tilled the land; in *Belle*, the hero returns to his wife.

It's not a compromise. At a certain point, there is a feeling that the man has gone very far in his imagination and that it's time to come back to solid earth, to simple things and to the certainty of the love of his wife. It's an alternative to the rush of the imagination. Of course, the imagination starts up again immediately . . .

Do you ever improvise in your work?

I always prepare very carefully, because that is the only way I can find enough balance in my work to let myself improvise.

But I never improvise outside the framework I've already set. Given my style, it would be very dangerous.

How do you see the function of the camera?

Apart from the fact that the camera is used to make precise, plastic frames of things and people, it's always used in the service of the actors. It is mainly devoted to the actors, so it moves with them to be at exactly the right distance for my purpose, to look at them in the best way possible. So there are many long takes and there are no camera movements without a meaning. I don't like people to notice that there's a camera and to see that there is camerawork. But the camera gives things and people their secret meaning; it accentuates the importance, or the unimportance, of what they say.

How do you work with actors? Do you tell them exactly what they have to do?

I'm always discussing with them, trying to get the best out of them, letting them invent ways of reacting. The main thing doesn't seem to be the use of techniques. It's more a way of being with the actors—speaking and eating with them, talking about the part if that's what they want or not talking about it if they prefer it that way. The main thing for me has always been not so much the direct work with an actor as the choice of an actor. The main thing begins when the actor doesn't even know about being chosen. Because if the choice is right, the rest follows smoothly. Working with actors is more a matter of human relations than technique.

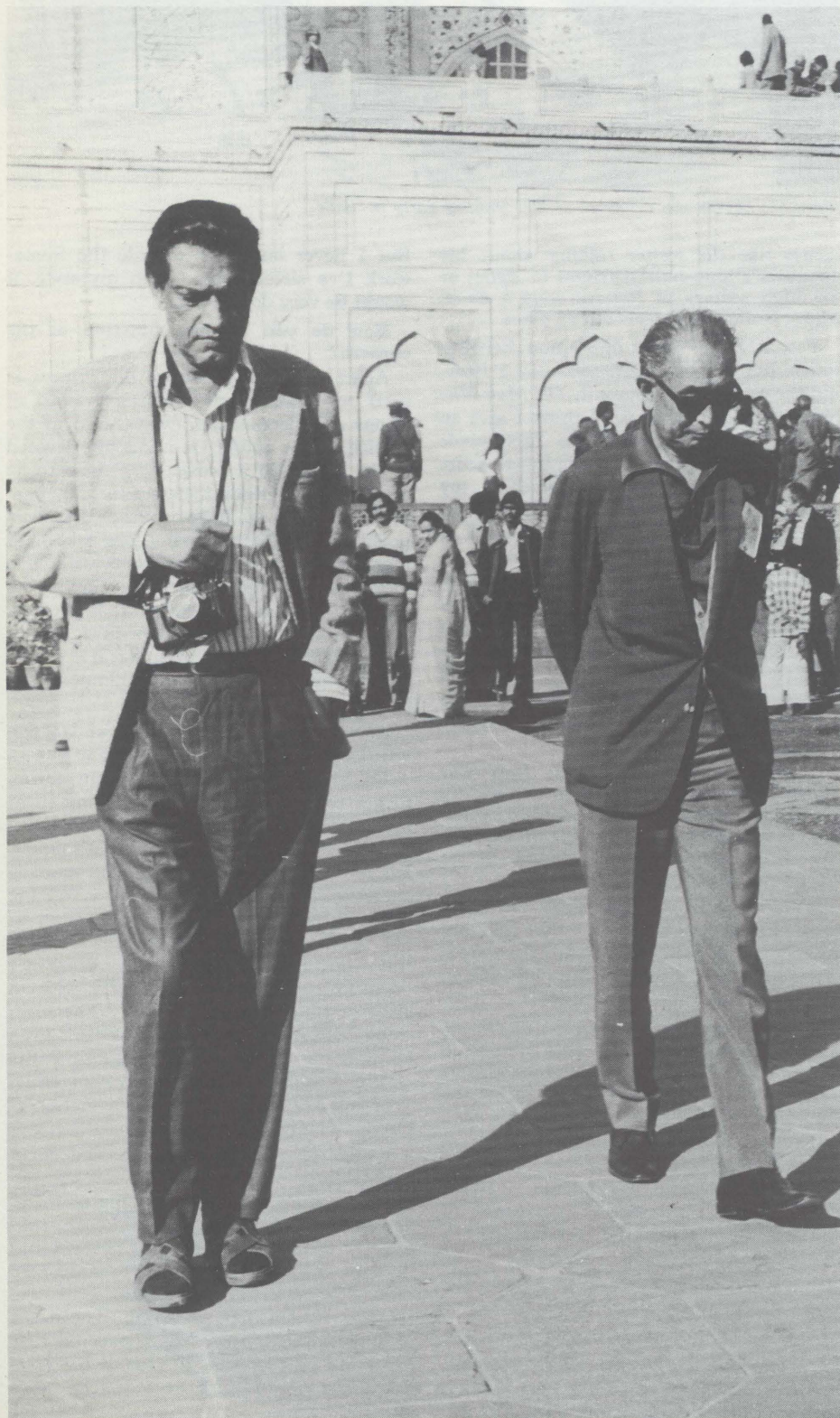
Which of your films gives you most satisfaction?

I have much pleasure in some of them, and always much displeasure. *Rendez-vous à Bray* is the most perfectly shaped, but perhaps it's not the strongest. From the point of view of the presence of death, the strongest is *Un Soir, un Train*. The decay of things, the sense of fate, may be best expressed in *The Man Who Had His Hair Cut Short*. But I can't be objective about my own work. ■

Indian Gambits

Satyajit Ray and Kurosawa at the Taj Mahal;
Antonioni in background on right

Tom Milne



'Should the cinema be education or mental escapade?' This inimitably phrased option, from a questionnaire bandied about at this year's New Delhi Festival, suggests the quagmires facing the new Indian cinema as it slowly emerges from beneath the ample yet totally inanimate body of an industry that remains the largest in the world, still secure from the threat of television, and keeps a captive audience happily fed on the traditional pap of melodrama-with-songs. Yet an alternative, avid and clamorous audience seems to be making its presence increasingly felt.

As much as anything, it is probably the rigorous currency restrictions, resulting in a strict rationing of American films and an almost total absence of any other foreign product (there is still no 'art house' circuit in India, though one is mooted) that has brought this situation close to crisis point. Delhi is one of the few international festivals to make a comfortable profit, purely because the extensive information screenings, held at thirteen of the town's commercial cinemas, are besieged by ordinary moviegoers in quest of something different, whether good films or the foreign licence still so sternly suppressed in the home product.

In a probably inevitable backlash, Indian critics and commentators seem to have developed a solemn conviction that education and 'mental escapade' are necessarily mutually exclusive propositions. Foreign visitors to the festival (notably film-makers, who included Kurosawa, Antonioni, King Hu, Vatroslav Mimica, Kazan, Bo Widerberg, Vilgot Sjöman, Carlos Saura, Alain Tanner) were besieged by eager information-hunters whose questions ultimately reduced themselves to two burning topics: humanism or sex-and-violence. Meanwhile, the parade of dreary, eminently forgettable films in competition (Hitchcock's *Family Plot* was the joyous exception) suggested that the selectors' criterion was education first and last, and enjoyment nowhere. While the Indian entry, Gulzar's *Mausam*, revealed confusion of another but allied sort: a hopelessly compromised attempt to repackage the traditional pap which simply resulted in Claude Lelouchery.

'It's a depressing situation,' says Satyajit Ray, referring to the Indian film scene in general, and in particular to the almost total dismissal by Bengali critics of *Days and Nights in the Forest* (a personal favourite among his own films) as formless, meaningless and unnecessary. There is here, Ray reflects, a problem in that a certain Western sensibility informs the manner and structure of *Days and Nights in the Forest*. Yet he was also attacked, after the much more overtly committed *Distant Thunder*, for using colour in a film about human suffering. And as Ray observes, the main point of Bannerji's novel was that though it was not a time of drought, though the landscape was lush and the harvest good, yet people could still die of famine. 'The book suggests all the time this kind of ironical contrast between the beauty of the surroundings and the sufferings of the people; but the convention is that if people are suffering, the trees should suffer too...'

Ray is not the only Indian film-maker to have had to reckon with short-sighted critical pressures at home. Since attracting

attention abroad with the elliptical and quizzically funny seriousness of *Bhuvan Shome*, the Bengali film-maker Mrinal Sen has graduated to Hindi-speaking films, thus gaining a much wider audience, but at the price of adopting a tub-thumping tone of voice to drive his message home. Pleasant to note, therefore, that in his first film in colour, *The Royal Hunt*, a sharply satirical tract about a remote jungle tribe whose way of life is destroyed through the benevolent incomprehension of the British Raj, Sen has returned to the subtleties of *Bhuvan Shome*, doubling his political charge by investing his villains with their fair measure of charm and humanity.

The beginning is absolutely electrifying: a subjective track through the oppressive jungle night, a villager awakening in horror and starting to beat an alarm on an empty petrol-tin that is taken up in turn by other villagers until, as the credits come up, all hell seems to be breaking loose. Wild pigs, it transpires, have invaded the village and destroyed the crops; a white sahib on horseback, the local administrator out for a day's hunting, rides gracefully past, admiring the idyllic beauty of the village but oblivious to its little tragedy; and the hapless villagers find themselves drifting inexorably into the hands of the moneylenders.

Meanwhile a curious sympathy, based on a mutual respect for each other's prowess as a hunter (and perhaps just a shade of sexual attraction), springs up between the portentous, middle-aged administrator and a half-naked young tribesman, perfect incarnation of the noble savage. The boy proudly but hesitantly arrives on the Residency lawn with a deer he has stalked and caught alive; the delighted administrator responds with a guided tour of his big game trophies; and before long the boy is posing with his bashful bride while memsahib ('A masterpiece, my dear') delicately sketches them. But the graceful and touching relationship proves to be built on the quicksands of alien cultures. When a lecherous moneylender seizes the bride in lieu of an unpaid debt, the boy kills him and hurries to the Residency to announce that he has successfully rid the jungle of its most savage beast. Handed over to the proper native authorities, he is, despite sincere testimony from the master as to his pet's disposition, duly hanged. Exquisitely shot by K. K. Mahajan so that the cool lawn and steamy jungle are held in precarious balance, *The Royal Hunt* is a devastatingly accurate analysis of the auto-destruct mechanism of colonialism.

With his first two films, *The Seedling* and *Night's End*, Shyam Benegal hinted that the Hindi cinema had at last acquired a director who might one day rival Bengal's Satyajit Ray. His fourth, *Manthan* (there is an intervening children's film, *Charandas Chor*), takes him another giant step along the way with a brilliantly controlled exploration of the problems encountered by a government team, headed by a young veterinary surgeon, which arrives in a village to help set up a milk co-operative. Not, on the face of it, an exactly joyous subject, but with his superbly assured *mise en scène* (stylish, subtly probing, and entirely at ease with flamboyant set pieces like the burning of the outcasts' settlement), Benegal turns it into an uncommonly absorbing account of the tangled



The Kannada film 'Pallavi': 'Some of the qualities of early Rohmer...'

web of hostilities and unexpected loyalties that inevitably attend such a venture. Doomed, as it turns out, largely because of conflicting needs within the complex social structure that both unites and divides the village (landowner, headman, peasants, outcasts), though not without leaving indelible traces . . . The title, translated as *The Churning*, refers not only to milk churns and social upheaval, but also to the long and laborious process at the beginning of time whereby, according to Hindu mythology, Chaos was ultimately reduced to the harmonies of a brave new world.

Since I saw *Manthan* only in an unsubtitled print, further consideration of its merits will have to wait until the film is shown in Britain later this year. It is worth noting, however, the extraordinary circumstances under which the film came to be a presentation by '500,000 Farmers of Gujarat' (the only comparable example in cinema that comes to mind is Renoir's *La Marseillaise*). Members of the Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation, it seems, had seen and liked some of Benegal's work, and came up with the proposal that they might perhaps finance a film. The implementation of this proposal was not, however, a top-level union decision accompanied by a levy. Each member of the Co-operative, as his milk was collected, was asked for, and consented to, a donation of two rupees (about 15p). Furthermore, no strings were attached as to the kind of film Benegal was to make, and it was only afterwards that he made his own decision to tackle the subject of a co-operative. At present the film has no Indian distributor, and in a further blow against the Bombay system, Benegal plans to distribute it himself, probably in 16mm since there is no alternative cinema circuit.

Perhaps the most remarkable sign of new stirrings is the example of the Karnataka cinema (also known as Kannada cinema, from the principal language of Karnataka, formerly Mysore). Hardly known hitherto as a film state—only 88 films from the

beginnings in 1934 up to 1960—it now has four studios with thirteen sound stages, and produces more films annually than Bengal in a situation which is not without its parallels to the French New Wave. The main reasons, undoubtedly, are tax exemptions for films, a readily available government subsidy (100,000 rupees for a black-and-white film, 150,000 for colour), and the fact that the state's flourishing literary movement has been drawn into active participation. Girish Karnad, for instance, is basically a novelist with a considerable reputation, but in addition to becoming something of a star actor (notably in *Night's End* and *Manthan*), he has also written and directed two Kannada features and is at work on a third, to be co-directed with B. V. Karanth, who made the very promising *Chomana's Drum*.

The first, *Kaadu* (soon to be seen in London), is a grimly realistic account of the effects of encroaching civilisation on two isolated villages, but the second, *Once Upon a Time*, is a martial arts epic featuring the mercenary warriors, not unlike samurai, who roamed Karnataka in the 12th century. Refreshingly in an Indian context, Karnad defends the serious film-maker's right to elements of mental escapade: 'Entertainment has been so debased that it has come to connote something cheap . . . Hitchcock, John Ford and others of their ilk made entertaining and good films.' Two other Kannada films I saw at Delhi confirm that these film-makers, encouraged by the fact that local audiences eagerly await their work and that all these 'new wave' efforts have recovered their costs, are not afraid to go out on limbs of their own. *Pallavi*, directed by P. Lankesh (another writer), is a gravely introspective, beautifully modulated little film essay about a girl student who marries a middle-aged businessman (played by Lankesh himself), and then becomes tortured by the thought that she has thrown away her chances of both life and love. It approaches some of the qualities of early Rohmer.

Ray's first film in Hindi, set in Lucknow in the 1850s, is a comedy (mainly) in which two noblemen play chess while the East India Company plays power politics. Saeed Jaffrey and Sanjeev Kumar (below) are the chess fanatics; Shabana Azmi (right) plays the Mirza's wife. Photographs: Nemaï Ghosh

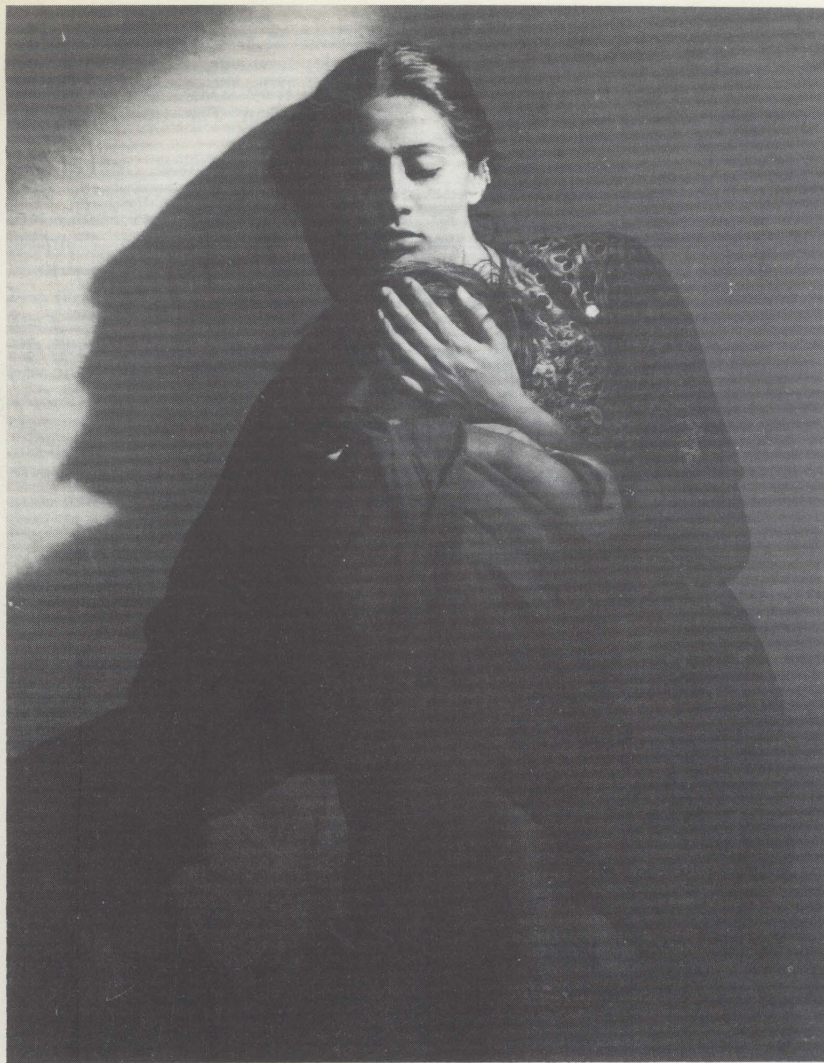


Satyajit
Ray's

The Chess Players

SHATRANJ KE KHILARI





Shyam
Benegal's

MANTHAN

The Churning

'Milk churns and social upheaval' in an Indian village, as a government team tries to set up a cooperative. Remarkably, Benegal's film was financed by subscriptions from the Gujarat farmers.



Swan Song, directed by G. V. Iyer, is even more boldly introspective: a sort of spiritual odyssey structured entirely by the classical ragas sung by its hero, an 18th century court musician who, after obtaining the favour of the gods to prove himself the greatest singer in the land, finds himself drawn into a hermit's existence to protect his gift from contamination, and finally, rather than submit to the new ruler's demands, cuts out his own tongue after an ecstatic last performance of his supreme raga. Astonishingly, Iyer is an experienced commercial director who reputedly embarked on a three-year period of penance and study after having his eyes opened to the true possibilities of cinema, and then emerged to make *Swan Song*. Had he not betrayed his commercial origins by resorting to a series of hideous zooms utterly at variance with his contemplative theme, *Swan Song* might have been a film to cherish alongside Ray's *The Music Room*.

Meanwhile, in Bengal, with locations in Lucknow and a final session in the Calcutta studios to come, Ray himself has completed the first stage of shooting on *The Chess Players*, his first Hindi-speaking film: 'Yes . . . I suppose making my first Hindi film is a significant step. It will certainly reach a very much wider audience, no question, though it will equally certainly not reach the *Sholay* audience . . . I've been avoiding this step for such a long time, partly because of the fact that I don't know Hindi well enough to be able to write dialogue, and I always write my own screenplay. I mean, you *can* do a screenplay, but . . .

'I did this one in English and then, since I didn't trust the usual Bombay dialogue-writers, it was translated by two comparatively unknown people: Shama Zaidi, who also did the costumes, and Javed Siddiqui, who is my assistant on the film, a new assistant since I needed a Hindi-

speaking one. Then, after the dialogue was translated, we went over every single line, considering alternatives. By that time I had learned a bit of Hindi—I did have a smattering already, everybody does, but I was worried about nuances, selecting from among several alternative expressions, which I can always do in Bengali very easily. Even during shooting, with the actors, there were little modifications, dropping words, substituting words. Normally this doesn't happen with my films, these days anyway, because the dialogue is written with certain actors and certain actions in mind, so that we work with a finished product and almost no changes are necessary at the time of shooting.'

Based on a Hindi story written by Munshi Premchand some fifty years ago, and set in 1857 during the last days of the Mogul Empire, *The Chess Players* looks (to judge from some exquisite colour slides I saw of the first two weeks on set) like being one of Ray's most lavishly beautiful films, and (to judge from the purrs of contentment from all concerned) one of his happiest productions. It also seems to have evolved under the benevolent influence of what Cocteau would have called a sign.

Nearly twenty years ago, when he was in India mulling over a project to film *The Man Who Would Be King* with Clark Gable, Humphrey Bogart and Cantinflas, John Huston was instrumental in getting Ray's career off the ground by recommending *Pathar Panchali*—which he saw in a silent, incomplete rough-cut—for its world première at the Museum of Modern Art. When Huston finally made *The Man Who Would Be King* in 1975, the Cantinflas role as the ebullient Gurkha Billy Fish was played by Saeed Jaffrey, an Indian actor whose major disappointment then was his failure to win the role of Anacleto in *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, and his major ambition, to make his first Indian film under Satyajit Ray's direction. Now he is playing

one of the leads in *The Chess Players* (spoiling the circle, however, Ray cast him not from *The Man Who Would Be King*, which he hasn't seen, but *The Guru*), his first Indian film.

Jaffrey, a superb vocal mimic (his devastating imitations, of everybody from Huston, Julie Harris and Ravi Shankar to Michael Caine imitating Sean Connery, unfortunately don't transfer to the printed page), enthusiastically brackets Huston and Ray as perfect actors' directors: 'What I call gardener directors, who have selected the flowers, know exactly how much light and sun and water the flowers need, and then let them grow. And if the flower has the conscientiousness not to betray the trust of the gardener, then they let you alone to grow in a natural sort of way. All a director like John or Satyajit has to do is just sort of look at you, and you know exactly what he wants. On *The Man Who Would Be King*, Huston really gave me only two directions. In the scene towards the end when Billy Fish has to warn Peachy and Dravot about the impending danger of godhood, there is a certain sadness there, and being by nature a lyrical person, I was inclined to lyricise it a little bit. "Less of a Bengali poet, Saeed," said John, "and more of a Black Militant, that's what I want." Then what you call the jack-in-the-box quality in Billy Fish, that came from John: "Ferret . . . like a ferret, Saeed."

'Satyajit I found to be more than I'd imagined him to be. He's a man of such wide sympathies, such a gentle, shy person with so many levels—artist, musician, scholar and all the rest—that it's almost frightening. If Huston is a great master of the *sweep*, the great man of the West with touches of Hemingway and Captain Ahab and little bits of Tagore thrown in . . . in his latter years there is a kind of mystical quality about him . . . Ray is very much a man of nuance. Everything he does is toned by a musician's ear.'

Premchand's story is about two Indian noblemen, the Mir and the Mirza (played by Saeed Jaffrey and Sanjeev Kumar), who are so monomaniacally devoted to chess that, after seeking refuge from an irritated wife at one home and an importunate royal recruiting officer at the other, they happily continue their tournament, picnic style, in a ruined mosque on the river-bank. Well aware that the East India Company is in the process of taking the country over by force, but putting off till *mañana* the decision to do anything about it, the two noblemen meanwhile come to mortal blows over their game . . . Focusing almost exclusively on the two fanatical chess players, the story is really just an elegant little comic anecdote which might perhaps be interpreted, given Premchand's opening paragraph about the general state of decadence ('It was the time of Wajid Ali Shah. Lucknow was plunged in pleasures . . .'), as a cautionary parable about the reasons why India came under British rule.

RAY: 'Well, that is only partially true about the decadence. Premchand obviously hadn't done all the research we have been able to do; and lots of new facts have come out since the story was written. I have of course elaborated the story, and without giving away any secrets can tell you that I have

Shyam Benegal, the director of 'Manthan'



established the characters of the two wives, who were very shadowy in the original. The Mir is a cuckold though he doesn't know it, except at the very end; his wife has a lover, which is why she doesn't want him playing chess at home. The Mirza's wife doesn't get irritated just because she has a headache and he won't pay any attention. She interrupts the game because she wants him to make love to her, but he fails because his mind is on chess and says, "I'll prove it to you tomorrow that I love you. Tomorrow I'll finish early . . ."

"The story begins with these characters, then goes into a reel-long exposition of the relationship between the British and the Oudh over the previous hundred years. It develops almost a documentary character, using documents, re-enacted sequences, cartoons, animation, but I think it's important because so few people know the history of this period. It was a relationship based on a kind of friendship on the surface, but the British were fighting their wars, the Oudh happened to be the richest province, and there were constant loans, some of which were never repaid . . . that sort of thing.

"The King, Wajid Ali Shah, was not born to rule; it was by accident that he ascended the throne. He was by temperament a poet and a musician, who wrote operas and founded the first Hindi theatre, and he made the culture of Lucknow famous for its elegance. In the early stages he tried to be a good king, reforming this and that, holding daily parades, maintaining the army and so on. Then the Resident suggested that there was no need to do all this: we have our own

troops guarding your frontiers, so you be happy, you do what you like doing best. Later the King came to realise what the British were planning, giving him three days to decide whether to sign a treaty of abdication, while the East India Company had decided that, whether he signs or not, we take over. He knew he was a bad ruler, but he was not meant to rule and that was his attitude: "I wish I had never sat on the throne."

"After ten minutes of this, we come back to the chess players, who never meet the King or the Resident, General Outram, or anybody. They *know* about the possibility of takeover, but they don't want to fight; what they're really worried about is whether they'll be able to go on playing chess under British rule. Their entire story, except for the very last scene, which suddenly becomes very moving, I think, is comic. The story of the takeover is quite dramatic, has a different feel, different texture, and they run parallel. There's a thematic link, and the theme emerges eventually as one of non-involvement. But that emerges at the very end. One probably begins to wonder earlier what's going on . . . this is one story, this is another, but gradually, gradually, I think . . ."

JAFFREY: "Our chess games are, on another level, the chess game played between the Resident and the last, so-called profligate King. Actually, Wajid Ali Shah was one of the most colourful characters in Indian history, and there is an ambivalence in the way Satyajit sees the "decadence" of his reign. In a way Wajid Ali Shah is like

Satyajit. I mean, Satyajit doesn't have thirty-two concubines and so forth. But this man was a sort of embodiment of Krishna, the great lover. He was a man of love, and the people loved him. He used to write poetry, which will be featured in the film. He used to compose songs, which were sung by everybody, by the man in the street. Now, to Outram's slightly, if you will pardon the expression, Scottish puritan upbringing, all this was profligacy (although, again, Outram is not presented as a villain: the beauty of Satyajit is that there are no villains, unless it's society). But this was in fact the flowering of the culture. Because you know Muslim culture lapsed after Aurungzebe, the last great Mogul king, who was a puritan and a tremendous bigot, banned music and any signs of colourful activity, while he himself used to translate the Koran and things like that. But this time, 1856, was the flowering of poetry, the great Urdu poets were born in that age, the great music was written, the Kathak court dances were encouraged . . . not only encouraged, Wajid Ali Shah was so knowledgeable that he used to *teach* some of the gurus. All this opulence, this beauty, is there in the film.

"Also, without letting the cat out of the bag about the plot, the last scene between the two of us, Sanjeev and myself, should be . . . (knock on wood—it isn't in the can yet). The story inclines towards melodrama, and melodrama is something that is not in Satyajit's vocabulary at all. However tarnished, however defeated, life continues . . . Oh dear, I've probably let the cat out after all."

Chabrol's Game of Mirrors from page 81

the actor. In *Alice* there is a doubling of the actors in that they play roles which in turn play roles. As for transformation, the film is about passage, flight, movement through time and space. Thus there must be transformation; otherwise there is no film. The décor changes, but the passage itself implies a transformation from life to death—or rather a transformation of the dead to the living, because one could regard what happens to Alice in the house as life and what happens to her both before and after as death. What happens in the house could then represent her period of gestation. Does the film then begin with her death or with her birth? There are many elements in the film to suggest the latter. She is, after all, coming out of the car the way a child comes out of the womb. It is a mystery. What is interesting is not to know that she is dead, but death itself. It is a film which makes death sweet; it is never frightening.

Yet isn't it a rather pessimistic film? There is the cyclist at the end who glances indifferently at the accident and pedals away.

But that might be very optimistic! He sees she is dead. Perhaps he is going to get help, to find a telephone. After all, he pedals away very fast. No, the film is neither pessimistic nor optimistic. It is a logical series of events which will be intellectually satisfying only if one accepts the double point of view of fantasy and reality.

Since you have become interested in the fantastic, does that mean that the bourgeois tales are finished?

Just about, though I still have a couple of ideas in mind along that line. I would like to make a film about two college friends who meet after thirty years or so. They hated each other in college, but now they throw themselves into each other's arms. That idea pleases me a lot. And I would like to make a film about a cop in charge of an investigation who comes to realise that the criminal situation is a mirror image of his own personal life. That idea is perfect for me.

Your films have been described often enough as possessed of a Balzacian sensibility. I know you admire Balzac, yet you have never filmed him.

One can't transpose Balzac's time. I broke my back trying to transpose *La Peau de Chagrin* to a modern setting, but I couldn't find a way . . . Anyway, I would rather take an undeveloped idea—not something so completely developed and filled out. I have been offered big novels. Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* and Buzzati's *Le Désert des Tartares*, for example. As they are already nearly perfect as literature, I don't know how one could impose images on them. It would all be too academic for me. I haven't yet seen Zurlini's film of *Désert*, but I would have had to add lots of flourishes to it since the subject of that book is the absence of something. Of course critics would say that one had betrayed the book. The answer to that is usually that one has been faithful not to the letter but to the

spirit. The problem is that with *Désert* the letter is the spirit. No, I prefer either to use an original script or to adapt a thriller.

But neither Simenon nor Chandler?

Simenon, yes, I've tried from time to time, but the rights have always been too expensive. With Chandler one would have to use Los Angeles. You can't change the city. Absolutely not. And I don't want to go to Los Angeles, or to re-invent it here.

So that your next project will be either the college friends or the cop?

I don't know, perhaps one of them. I would also like to make a film about the municipal elections, but I can't decide if it would be best to make it during or after them.

Wouldn't you run into the same censorship problems that you encountered when you suggested corruption in high places in *Les Noces Rouges*?

I don't think so, because things have changed. The forms of power are growing weaker and they cannot now forbid much because they know it would come right back to slap them in the face.

But they burn films here. Look at the court's decision to burn that pornographic film . . .

Yes. They burned one. Of course there are still copies of that film in the producer's office. But all the same it's symbolic. It is lamentable and odious. Oh, the whole story is ridiculous, but dangerous all the same. It is odd. I didn't know that you could burn films any more. I thought that all film was now non-flammable.

TV DRAMA: The Case Against Naturalism

John McGrath

'Diary of a Young Man'



The 1976 Edinburgh Festival included a retrospective of the television work of the late James MacTaggart, producer/director extraordinary and a prime mover in the revolutionising of TV drama in the mid-60s. MacTaggart's productions include David Mercer's *And Did Those Feet?*, Nell Dunn's *Up the Junction* (directed by Ken Loach) and the Nigel Barton plays by Dennis Potter; others have since been wiped or are otherwise irretrievably lost. John McGrath, himself a scriptwriter and director (though he has now left television to work with a theatre company—'a better way of going insane'), worked with MacTaggart. As the first of a series of MacTaggart memorial lectures he read a paper on TV drama, of which the following is a slightly edited version.

I would like to talk about what was going on in television drama in the early 60s, when Jimmy MacTaggart came to London. My choice of this period is not entirely arbitrary. At that time questions were being asked which have still not been answered. At that time there was a level of serious thought about the medium which seems to have become impossible today. I'd like to ask why this is so. And to raise once again some of the issues we debated then, issues of form, of naturalism, realism, narrative and alienation.

In 1964 Troy Kennedy Martin wrote a piece for the theatre magazine *Encore*, which tried to sum up some of the discussions that several of us in the BBC had

been holding endlessly during the previous three years. I'd like to quote from it:

'The common denominator in all naturalistic plays is that they tell a story by means of dialogue. Naturalism deals with people's verbal relationships with each other. When it deals with people's personal relationships with God, or with nature, or with themselves it does so by refraction through some dialogue style. When it deals with any of the abstracts—fear, impotence, hunger, hate, love or hope—it does so indirectly through symbols or again through dialogue with other people—wife, colleague, or even a stranger. Often these relationships become so strong that they overwhelm the original theme. The second common denominator is

that naturalism works within a strict form of natural time—studio-time equals drama-time equals Greenwich Mean Time. Fades equal a long lapse of time, dissolves a short lapse and cuts immediate time. The third common factor is that this makeshift bastard born of the theatre and photographed with film techniques has brought two basic attitudes from these media which can now be seen to be destructive in television.

'ONE. Since naturalism evolved from a theatre of dialogue, the director is forced into photographing faces talking and faces reacting. The director faced with a torrent of words can only retreat into the neutrality of the two- and three-shot where the camera, caged from seizing on anything of significance, is emasculated and only allowed to gaze around the room following the conversation like an attentive stranger. This enslavement of the visual element is too binding.

'TWO. Since naturalism visually evolved from Hollywood film techniques (no matter how far it has developed since then), there is still retained a deep-rooted belief that the close-up of an actor's face somehow acts subjectively on the viewer. We, therefore, get the spectacle of writer, actor and director all combining to somehow involve

the viewer emotionally in a character's predicament by close-up writing, acting and shooting. This attempt to evoke subjective emotion similar to the Hollywood cinema of the 40s is on a direct collision course with the objectivity of the camera.

'The primary concern of the new drama must be therefore: to free the camera from photographing dialogue; to free the structure from natural time; and to exploit the total and absolute objectivity of the television camera.'

Thirteen years later, the cameras are still gazing around rooms, and close-ups are still being thrust at us nightly in the naive belief that they will bring us close to tears—so they do. And the objectivity of the television camera is, to my knowledge, no longer heatedly argued over in the canteen at White City. Why is this?

To get somewhere near an answer, it would be best to try to describe the atmosphere in the BBC in London that we were working in. It was no Golden Age. On my first day as a Scriptwriter/Adaptor, I was shown into an office in a grotty cul-de-sac off Shepherd's Bush. I was to share the office with another of these Scriptwriter/Adaptor creatures. After my guide had left us together, a long silence. I looked bleakly at the railway cutting outside the window. He stroked his chin. I was summoning up the courage to ask what we were supposed to do, when he said dreamily: 'The last bloke to come in here sat at that desk for ten minutes, borrowed twopenny to go out to buy an *Evening Standard*, and never came back.' I couldn't blame him. Fortunately, I stayed long enough to get a cheap lunch in the canteen, and started talking.

My only previous contacts with the BBC had been with Norman Rutherford, then Deputy Head of Drama, who had seen a play of mine and invited me to the BBC for a chat, and my 'interview' with Michael Barry, reigning Drama supremo, who literally hid behind his knees, peering round them from time to time to ask the odd nervous question, appearing to nod vigorously whenever I spluttered a reply. They were both very kind men, serious, intelligent and miraculously self-effacing. Michael—and after he left, Norman—presided benignly over something resembling in its structure nothing so much as medieval Scotland: an assortment of producers, like chieftains, jealously guarding their territories, marauding venomously on to the other's patch, reiving writers like cattle, entering into alliances, breaking them, absolute monarchs in their own glen, with no roads, no infrastructure of communications to impose the will of central government on them, and Rudolf Cartier, the Lord of the Isles, away in a land that didn't even speak the same language.

There was very rarely, except in the case of *Dixon of Dock Green*, a distinction between Producer and Director. *Dixon* was Light Entertainment anyway. No, the Drama Producer was his own man, or woman, and carried the entire responsibility for what he or she did—money, casting, rewrites, directing, the lot. They were given this responsibility because Michael Barry or Norman Rutherford trusted them. Of course they kept an eye on things, but the

atmosphere was one in which the Producer-Director could make his own path forward, at his own pace, with sympathy and a great deal of security.

This admirable anarchy led, inevitably, to a great deal of rubbish hitting the screen. It led to a great deal of pomposity and self-importance among the chieftains, and a certain amount of despairing speculation about the retiring age for BBC staff among the impatient new generation—but it embodied a meaningful respect for the independence of the creative force; it gave confidence, indeed the necessary arrogance, to those who need it most; and it opened up the interesting possibility that if even a few daring spirits could be infiltrated into this position, they could really get things moving without having to do too much explaining to, or compromising with, an elaborate hierarchy.

When Sydney Newman* arrived on the scene, he was a combination of the Duke of Cumberland at Culloden and General Wader: he brought the chiefs to heel, with bribery or force of arms, and he built roads and bridges, with a vengeance—Directors, Producers, Story Editors, Heads of Plays, Heads of Series, an infrastructure of command. Before Sydney, there was, to a great degree, a healthy, old-fashioned, liberal respect for the creative imagination of the director. A fact which aided this independence was that the technology of check and double-check scarcely existed. A huge percentage of drama went out live. I put out 50 minutes live *Z-Cars* every two or three weeks for its first six months. Those plays which were not put out live were tele-recorded on film, and elaborate editing was discouraged. Videotape was in its infancy, and had to be sliced with a razor to be edited. Dissolves were out. As slicing meant that the tape was not re-usable, slicing was not encouraged. You put your entire show, if possible, on film or tape, and that was it. More often you put it out live, and that was definitely it. There was very little chance for Louis B. Mayer to get in and re-cut anything. So the process of 'reviewing' programmes was mild and generally *post facto*. In other words, the producer/director carried a real responsibility, not a token one...

Another contributory organisational factor was the existence of the Script Department, which I had joined as a Scriptwriter/Adaptor in early 1960. I never did find out what I was supposed to do. I was assigned to a few programmes as liaison between writer and producer, but as they seemed to get on fine anyway, all I had to do was go to the first read-through and look serious if it was more than ten minutes over length—then leave them to sort it out. There were about thirty of us doing this at the time, some more assiduously than others. We were also supposed to suggest things. I suggested a series of dramatisations of D. H. Lawrence stories, only to be told, good idea, go off and do one. As I had no idea how to begin, I decided to go on a directors' course to find out how television really worked. Before doing that, and for some time after, I was free to wander into any control gallery any time, to get familiar with the medium. I spent a lot of time watching

Michael Peacock putting *Panorama* together, dodging Donald Baverstock's gesticulations as *Tonight* went out, standing at the back of the dubbing theatre, and learning about organised energy from Michael Elliott's early productions. And we all spent a lot of time talking. We were involved in the medium, committed to it, as the popular medium of our day. We felt, in that atmosphere of benign anarchy, that we would, eventually, get our chance to make our contribution. And we had time, and energy, to argue passionately about our craft.

To the mob of Producer chieftains, we added a gang of Bovver Boys, Wee Scriptie Mentals, plotting to assassinate Naomi Capon. When we saw Jimmy MacTaggart's production of *Three-Ring Circus* coming out of Glasgow, and we heard he was coming to London, we thought we had at last found our Rob Roy—to confuse the metaphor and hereby end it.

What were we talking about? There are two basic questions about television as a medium for drama. One is: 'What goes?' This is the preoccupation of Heads of things and Executives. To us, the answer was obvious: unending streams of assorted naturalism. The other question is: 'What can this medium do?' That seemed to be the interesting one. This is what some of us thought at that time about naturalism—if I may quote Troy Kennedy Martin again:

'The present naturalistic drama began in America, where TV Theatre was overwhelmed by a new and dynamic naturalism which came to be identified with the work of Chayefsky and others. The organic growth of the Actors' Studio, the teachings of Stanislavsky, the paramount position of Freud in the American art-consciousness, all combined to create a vital theatre full of psychological motivation which could be adequately photographed with the available techniques at the disposal of the directors. It was a theatre of dialogue, a theatre of performances. It was a writer's theatre. But, first and foremost, which one tends to forget—it was still theatre. But because the new writers, their works and their artists won public acclaim through the television medium before going on to Broadway and Hollywood, the medium claimed that it had founded a television drama. This dangerous notion becomes more dangerous as time passes because the industry's belief in it becomes more absolute...'

But there was more to it than that. Naturalism contains everything within a closed system of relationships. Every statement is mediated through the situation of the character speaking. Mediated to the point of triviality. It is a way of *not* saying anything, of indicating that everything is tangential, and relative to its own milieu. In terms of presenting a picture of society, it can only reveal a small cluster of subjective consciousnesses, rarely anything more. Naturalism, of course, can and does achieve a great deal. But as a *form*, it imposes a certain neutrality about life on the writer, the actor and the audience. It says: here's the way things are for these people, isn't it sad—if a tragedy; isn't it funny—if a comedy; isn't it interesting—if by a good writer; God, it's boring—if by a bad one. It encapsulates the status quo, ossifies the

*BBC Head of Drama 1963–67.

dynamics of society into a moment of perception, crystallises the realities of existence into a paradigm, but excludes what it refers to. In the naturalistic play, few characters are allowed to be articulate; they are more likely to emote, incoherently. Every meaning is implicit, and ambivalent. Naturalism forces itself to present a world that is static, implied and ambivalent. This world-picture inherent in the form of the naturalistic drama, from Chayefsky to *Coronation Street*, can be transcended in the theatre by great writers—like Chekhov, Gorki, D. H. Lawrence, Ibsen. But can even this be achieved on television?

There was one ageing Scriptwriter/Adaptor who used to say to me: 'What is television? I'll tell you: television is a piece of furniture. Don't you forget that.' The odd thing was that we didn't. It's a piece of furniture for passing on information. One image at a time. There are several distinguishing features of the television image. One is that it lacks sensuality, *per se*. A cinema screen can flood the senses; within each frame an elaborate pattern of shape, and colour, can affect, overwhelm the consciousness, emotionally, sensually. A brilliant set, well lit, in the theatre can create a positive impression on the mind by way of the eye. But a television shot is, at best nice. The eye is not overwhelmed, it is looking at a piece of furniture for the next relevant piece of information. To expect more is to expect to listen satisfactorily to a symphony over the telephone.

This leads to the next feature of the television image: what Troy Kennedy Martin calls its objectivity. In other words, its reduction of empathy in the viewer to the point where one is looking *at* the screen, not being drawn into it. The spectacle of the weeping close-up on television is rarely more than repelling. The same actor or actress in the theatre could reduce an audience to massed sympathetic lumps in throats, with much the same performance. On the television screen, they drive you to reach for the dial: because of the nature of the image. The third characteristic of the television image is that it is conditioned by all the other images that have preceded it. Napalmed women in Vietnam running about on fire constitute an image of reality that few can forget. To expect to shock or horrify an audience with a nasty setback to our hero demands coming to terms with real shock and horror—even though the viewer has different terms of reference for each experience, and a different framework of response.

These three characteristics of the television image—its non-sensual, informative nature, its lack of empathy and its situation in the context of reported reality—are, I think, unique, and in their way admirable. None of them is particularly conducive to naturalist drama. What *are* they conducive to? What are their consequences? The first quality clearly indicates that information should flow in a linear manner, rather than dwelling on endless emoting faces. And the more information, the more satisfying the experience. The eye is an instrument for feeding the mind—the imagination must be kept on the move. The artistry is in the pacing of the information, more than the creation of visual beauty.

The second quality, the objectivisation of



Patrick Troughton in David Mercer's '*And Did Those Feet*' (BBC, 1965)

the image in television, implies that involvement of the viewer comes from a build-up of information, from a form of montage, from being carried into a story that moves forward at a pace that quickens the imagination rather than dwelling on the emotions. Emotions, indeed, can be aroused by the story, but by the narrative, by seeing what happens, rather than being drawn into the emotions of the characters to whom it is happening. Watch any football match. The emotion comes from the movement to the goal—and is rarely contained in the emotions of the emoting footballer.

And that leads to the consequences of the third quality, as I see them, of the television image: its relationship to the other images that pour out. When we think of drama in this context, two things are immediately noticeable. One is that drama images tend to be patently faked, slower moving and more ponderous than those of almost any other department. And secondly, they are totally lacking in variety. The resources of television for putting an image on the screen—film with voice over, stills, animation, split-screen, reporter talking to camera, freely illustrated song—these simply do not come into the vocabulary of naturalistic drama, so they are unspoken by the drama departments, by and large. When we come to more sophisticated devices for putting images together: montage, with soundtrack, creating a story-line from selected detail; jump-cuts with the urgency of the story linking the elements; moving from news-reader to film to stills—the language of a great deal of television—very few plays, even fewer series, dare speak it.

One thing emerged from consideration of these characteristics. It was clear that although naturalistic drama would, and did, 'go' on television, it was not the only thing the medium could do—in fact, it was a strait-jacket from which we wanted to release the poor patient. To quote Troy Kennedy Martin for the last time:

'The new drama will be based on story rather than plot. It will relate, directly, man's relation to God, to other men, to things—and to himself. Its action will be distilled and presented in a condensed form. It will be much more personal in style. It will compress information, emphasise fluidity, free the camera from photographing faces and free the structure from the naturalist tyranny of time. Through stream of consciousness and diary form it will lead to interior thought, interior characterisation. Further, it will open up 250 years of novels and stories from Defoe to Virginia Woolf, allowing television to draw ideas from a mainstream of English creative life rather than from a naturalist backwater.'

'But if this drama is ever to get off the ground it must create a new grammar, especially in relation to editing . . . It must develop new designs leading to maximum fluidity in the studio by doing away with the old box sets and creating acting areas specifically through the use of lighting. It must re-emphasise the importance of the nature of sound on drama (totally ignored up to now). It must develop sound (distortion) to the level of the art it is on radio for the purpose of both design and dramatic action. Lighting, Sound and Editing and Design therefore become not just points that make up a whole, but inextricably parts of each other. Design evolves through lighting, editing through sound, design through sound, editing through design and design through editing.'

This meant more than a new technique, however. The form would be part of the content; this narrative style would present a different world-picture from that inherent in naturalism. It would show a world that moved, pressures on that world, and essentially a world that changed, or could change. We felt we could show more of the world we lived in, more excitingly, and in a manner uniquely suited to television, and we knew that we could hold the mass audience with it.

Various groups of programmes came out of all this. The early *Z-Cars* emerged from a similar but *different* line of thinking, about the meaning of the series as form. What was needed to make some of this thinking into television was a director who could see what we were getting at. When Jimmy MacTaggart arrived, he more than understood, he topped us all, with argument, with enthusiasm, above all with practical ingenuity . . . He produced and directed a series called *Storyboard*, six shortish plays, mostly written by Troy Kennedy Martin. He produced a not so successful group of plays called *Studio 4*, and another group of plays and adaptations called *Teletale*, again with Troy responsible for most of the scripts. Then, before starting *The Wednesday Play*, he produced *Diary of a Young Man*, by Troy and myself, directed by Ken Loach and Peter Duguid, all in the early 60s. Apart from his contribution to the theoretical discussions, and the shaping of the scripts, it was Jimmy's ingenuity in attacking the directorial problems that the narrative drama raised which was truly remarkable.

Obviously servicing departments at the BBC were, and are still, geared to heavy-

weight naturalism: huge interiors of country mansions in Sussex present no problem. The usual approach to design was for the director to indicate to the designer what the sets were, how big, how many walls were needed, and what essential furniture. The designer hunted through stock, found his pieces and drew up little scale plans of each set. These were then cut out, placed on the scale drawing of the studio, and juggled about until they all fitted. (As a writer, one was made aware that more than five or six 'sets' would not 'fit in'. An epic was a play with big sets, a drama a play with small sets.) When all the sets fitted, they were stuck down, copied on to the studio plan and sent to the lighting man, who then flooded the whole thing with as much light as possible to cover all possible moves and meanders around the rooms involved from as many angles as possible. In rehearsal, the director plotted the scenes much as in a 50s stage play, and a few days before going into the studio a solemn group of technicians came into your church hall with their plans and trooped around from set to set, eyeing the actors like window-dressers eyeing unpredictable dummies. The director marked his chosen camera positions on the plan, wrote the lens he wanted and a rough description of the shot (e.g., 2-shot Mark and Annabel, or M.C.U. Inspector Brown) on the camera script. In the studio, the cameras moved to the indicated position, set the correct lens, aimed in the right direction, and behold, on your monitor, a 2-shot of Mark and Annabel, acting, with a set behind them.

Our aim was to revolutionise this process. We had to. In order to create narrative drama, we had to have 30 locations in the studio; or, as in one *Storyboard*, 36 in 30 minutes. More than that, we wanted to get away from box-sets and general lighting, the whole pseudo-theatrical approach to television. What had to be done, and what Troy Kennedy Martin and Jimmy MacTaggart did, was to create a method of writing, directing, designing, sound-plotting and lighting which was specifically for the lens of a television camera, not for an opera house. Each scene or episode had to be thought of in terms of the shot: what were the minimum requirements to tell that bit of the story? And what were the best resources to do it?

If a soundtrack could establish a forest, and lighting tell you visually you were meant to be in a forest, why did you need trees? If the actors acted as if they were in a forest as well, the information had been conveyed three times over. And not one piece of stock scenery had cluttered your studio. The story was what you were involved in, anyway. It was a question of the lighting being designed for one definite shot, not 50 possible shots. The scenery had to be created by the use of specific and accurate detail—either of actual set, or prop, or lighting, or sound; and that detail selected and placed so it simply told the story. Jimmy put together a team of designers, lighting-designers, technical managers, cameramen, sound men and production assistants who could create, together with himself and the writer, the bits and pieces to make the shots that would tell the story. His studios were like an explorer's souvenir board:

fragments of reality gathered together, reminders of many places visited. One area would be used several times over, with different lighting and different bits of detail and different camera angles. If the camera in one set-up moved two degrees right, it was in another town; two degrees left, another country. Nerve-racking times, for all. Possibly constricting for the actors, but I never heard any complain.

I realise I may have given the impression that every scene consisted of one rigidly held static shot. This was not true. Camera movement for the sake of camera movement, the last resort of the bored naturalistic director, was out. The art was to move when the next piece of information was required, and to design for that move, and any other shots demanded by the scene. But economy in the interest of narrative was what the style was all about.

There were other features of this style which were, to us, exciting. The liberation of the medium from Chayefsky meant that a lot of other sources of entertainment, pleasure, even of art, could be put to use. Like actual verbal style, wit, articulacy, satire: by allowing a character to narrate his own story, on the soundtrack, and relating it dynamically to the images, you could actually write with a bit of verve. Music: not for background emotive effect, but as a statement in itself that made its contribution to the meaning. Or animation—cartoon helping to say what happened. Or movement, stylised actor's movement, usually when the story took off, with the help of music, and wanted to have a little bop to itself. I shall never forget the end of *Tickets to Trieste*, a comic and directorial tour de force, all done in the studio, when the three agents, led by a young Michael Caine, lost their all in Trieste, shrugged, turned, and hipped together to the music of the Limelighters off the set and along a huge sky-cloth going round the studio past a continuous cartoon drawing of their journey back to London drawn all the way along it. That shot said: this is the story of what

happened. The movement told you that they didn't care, the music that they would keep on merrily. The cartoon told you: you're in a studio, really, but we don't care if you know that, and the music should have told you anyway that we *enjoy* being in this particular studio...

The early *Z-Cars* grew out of the same kind of thinking. Troy and I were both fascinated by an American super-cop series called *Highway Patrol*. It had action, pace, narrative drive, but was cheap, nasty and American. It was the pace that grabbed us, I suppose. We began to think about the series as an indigenous television form. It seemed, and still seems to me, to relate directly to that endlessly unrolling linear quality of television. The news is a series, so is *The Underwater World of Jacques Cousteau*, *The Big Match*, *Steptoe and Son*, *Hancock*, *Coronation Street*—all the things that really matter to a lot of television viewers. But the Drama Departments were not taking them seriously. Nor the writers and directors, who preferred the prestige of an *Armchair Theatre* or a BBC Sunday Night play.

Why was this? Part, I'm sure, of the tradition of the theatrical drama: the big slice of emotive, significant life, that critics said was 'powerful', even 'award-winning'. Right then, we thought, let's take the series as a form worth bothering about. Let's go for the pace, the relationship with an audience, of *Highway Patrol*, but let's go for something that will unfold in narrative form all the minor stories that make the fabric of our own society so alive. Use cops, OK, but as a device for getting into the small but important realities of the lives of the people who are going to be watching. No master-criminals, super-sleuths, gentlemen experts, cunning detectives—the police are *not* our heroes: the people are the heroes.

Stylistically, I went for one rigid rule: no camera move, no cut, until the next piece of story was to be revealed. But the stories unfolded very quickly, so there were a lot of cuts, and a lot of locations. For some,

Geraldine Sherman, Carol White and Vickery Turner in Nell Dunn's 'Up the Junction' (BBC, 1965)



we used film inserts and cued them in as the show went out. Most locations were in the studio. I used six cameras, and we tried to light and design for the lens, using a lot of set-pieces and a highly mobile camera crew. I worked with the actors on a style of acting that simply told the stories, usually several, involved in each episode. One episode, called *Friday Night*, actually had eight or nine stories going through it, all linked by the roving of the crew of one car on one evening. A motor-bike crash, a bloke coming home drunk from his retirement party—just little stories, events of an evening. We needed a style that would make these stories move, hold the attention. We placed a conscious emphasis on narrative—society, real and recognisable, but *in motion*. No slick tie-ups. No reassuring endings, where decency and family life triumphed. It seemed to work. But one feature of the series as a form that Troy and I had not reckoned with is that when successful, your series gets taken over by forces beyond your control. Suddenly people who didn't even know what we were doing a month before were telling us how things had to be. The old-fashioned liberal respect for the artist has its limits; one of them is offending the police. Another, far worse, is being successful. We left. The series rapidly became a lot of naturalistic dramas about how difficult is the policeman's lot . . .

The style of the early *Z-Cars*, as of Troy and Jimmy's *Storyboards*, and later our *Diary of a Young Man*, grew out of long discussion of the theory and practice of television. This was possible because there was a group of people who were energetically committed to the medium, because it was the medium the people of this country experienced. A group of people who *knew* the medium, were part of it—even if only, at the start, as underpaid layabouts. And who knew they would eventually be given the chance to do what they believed in, and be respected for it. Was it an accident that this situation arose at that time? No, of course not. Similar groups were beaver away in other corners of the BBC. On *Tonight*, Jack Gold and Kevin Billington were beginning, Ned Sherrin was directing the studio, Donald Baverstock and Alasdair Milne were editing the programme. Peter Watkins was doing battle with Huw Wheldon on *Monitor*, where Ken Russell was doing his best work. *That Was The Week That Was*, initiated by Sherrin, brought a great crowd of writers and performers into an atmosphere of satirical daring that was, in its form, pure television. John Boorman was making films in Bristol, Dennis Mitchell producing his hand-crafted documentaries, Philip Donnellan working in Birmingham . . . All these people had two things in common: they were deeply concerned, and articulate, about form. And they had immediate, unmediated access to the resources and the audience.

There must have been, and there were, good reasons for this. Historically, the British ruling class was riding high on the Harold Macmillan wave. We'd never had it so good. And this high-riding confidence was not being seriously challenged. Macmillan could afford to make liberal statements about the wind of change in Africa, and could let Peter Cook take the micky

out of him publicly, and not sue. The liberal gesture is easy to make when you're secure and unchallenged.

So the BBC, an institution ever sensitive to the mood of the ruling class, could encourage young rebels to have a go—could even allow Stuart Hood to be Controller of Programmes, Television. It could absorb, indeed it needed, a lot of controversial, energetic, imaginative people to push it on a pace or two, while the going was good. And so the artist could still be an artist, even in front of twenty million people: he was no real threat to the established order, indeed he made life more interesting. Within limits, of course. So, structurally, the BBC allowed a benign anarchy, in which almost anything could happen. The majority of the staff producers had anyway done a thorough job of interiorising the values of the ruling class. Every good member of the English professional class, to which they belong, has a built-in policeman—*le flic en soi*. So the troublemakers were only a minority, and not really going to make too much trouble anyway. Anarchy was a good risk.

That era has died out. Historically, the economic collapse of Britain has undermined the confidence of the ruling class. Politically, they *do* feel threatened. So the BBC, sensitive as ever, has altered its

structure. Anarchy is over. Centralised control, elaborate systems of command, supervision, check and review have been introduced. And on the personal level, the bully-boys have moved in to stay. The drive to power is more in evidence than civilised, sharp critical intelligence.

In terms of the ideas of a few of us in television drama in the early 60s, the results of these changes have been predictable. Sydney Newman introduced a power structure that divided drama into Plays, Series and Serials, each with a head man responsible to him. Below them, responsible to them, come group producers, who fill the slots and manage the money allocated. Each one of them has a Script Editor, whose job is to hunt out the material for the slots. Once found, and read by as many of the hierarchy as seems necessary—depending on its political stance—it is bought, and a director is found to put it on, told his budget and how it will be spent, and then away you go and be creative. Any changes are under constant supervision from the Script Editor, casting and design need approval from the Producer, and in rehearsal, and in the studio, the Producer and probably the Head of Whatever are there with notepads. The material is put on tape, edited, then reviewed by as many of the hierarchy as see fit to put their oar in. It

John Meillon and Jane Wenham in 'The Black Madonna', one of the 'Teletale' series adapted from a story by Muriel Spark (BBC, 1963)



can then be recut or altered or rejected before transmission. That process all seems normal and reasonable now. But it's a long way from Troy and Jimmy breaking new ground with *Storyboard*.

And, of course, with all this, naturalism has flourished as the dominant mode of television drama. The excitements now are not about the *form* of the drama, but about its content; with no realisation that the naturalistic form itself *is* the content, that it distorts what the writer is trying to say, contains it within safe limits. To take two examples, recently transmitted: *Days of Hope* and *Bill Brand*. I would estimate that if *Days of Hope* had said, clearly, what its makers wanted to say, it would never have been made—certainly never shown. Why then was it made and shown? Simply because the naturalistic form allowed it to imply, but never to *say*, what they meant. Its meaning could become blurred, mediated. It could, indeed, be excused, passed off as something else. *Bill Brand* suffered the same ambivalence: was Bill Brand a serious character who 'stood for', in a symbolic way, in a fictional world, the values the author admired; or was he just another type from the gallery of modern man, an interesting, maybe significant, specimen of a left-wing failure? Or was he a confusion

of both? The naturalism of the form did not allow the author to distinguish between Brand's politics and his personal life, or to make his attitude to either at all clear. There was a political debate going on, and a personal saga: the author was obviously trying to say something about both—but what?

Now I admire Trevor Griffiths, who wrote *Bill Brand*, and Jim Allen and Ken Loach and Tony Garnett, who made *Days of Hope*. They are serious creators. But why do they all take it for granted that serious meaning has to be wrapped up, in order to make television drama, in cloaks of fiction, emotion, human relationships and all the paraphernalia of naturalism? Because the meaning of form is no longer even discussed. Because no one seems to be asking What Can This Medium Do? But everybody accepts What Goes. Our thinking in the early 60s, the analysis and the answers we came out with, only begin to scrape the surface of the theoretical and practical problems involved. And I feel that our attack on naturalism is just as valid now as it was then. There are other ways of approaching the problems—and different analyses, different answers, and many more exciting things to happen. But the historical situation is against them happening. And things get worse.

The structures are against them happen-

ing. No TV station would dream of employing a group of seditious layabouts to sit around and argue all day. And even if they did, the structure of command is such that risky items—like the first episodes of *Z-Cars*—would have a hard time getting through; and even if *that* came to pass, they would be subject to scrutiny and interference. I only had one note from on high when I was directing the first *Z-Cars*: Would you please ask the constables to put their hats on straight. Today, the first episode of a new series is so thoroughly analysed, negotiated, and *controlled* that no one dare breathe.

And on the personal level—well of course there are a few people, in the management, individual producers, a few directors who *want* to ask What Can This Medium Do? They are there. The problem is one of creating the right meeting-place for intelligent critical minds. The writers are scattered over the countryside like handloom weavers, the directors buzz from station to station, to film, to the theatre. The producers have to fill their slots.

Are we going to allow television drama, then, to carry on churning out *Son of Barlow*, and imitations of imitations of imitations? Are the new writers coming into television going to carry on believing that naturalism *is* television? And that all you need to do is select your little corner of reality and turn it into a family drama with five sets? Are we going to encourage lazy, uncritical thinking, to step round theoretical discussion in true British fashion as if a dog had dropped it?

There are many people here who are now working full-time within television. They should ask themselves why so much fine critical intelligence is raising the level of debate about film, and so little exists about television. Why there is not one decent public forum, publication, programme or magazine, of television criticism. Why television drama is still thinking the way it did twenty years ago. Why the theatre has moved on in style way past Ibsen, but television drama remains static. Why the thinking of Brecht is now absorbed into the mainstream of theatre writing and directing, but the concept of alienated television drama, such as the Cheviot film,* has to be bitterly argued over at every level. Why 'series-writer', or 'series-director', are usually terms of abuse. Why, in the absence of theoretical discussion, the *form* of drama remains unquestioned, the content impotent, and style a matter of pretty pictures. Why the power to initiate has gone from the creators and is now the prerogative of the institution. Why plays are getting fewer, and later at night, and series getting more violent and sensationalist. Why television has failed to produce its own Dickens, or even an approximation of one.

The answers to these questions lie partly in the hands of television executives, who create structures and impose their personalities. They lie mostly in the hands of the writers and directors, who need to acquire the habit of theoretical discussion before churning out yet another ten years of naturalism. ■

Frank Windsor, Patricia Healey and Stratford Johns in one of the early 'Z-Cars' (BBC, 1962)

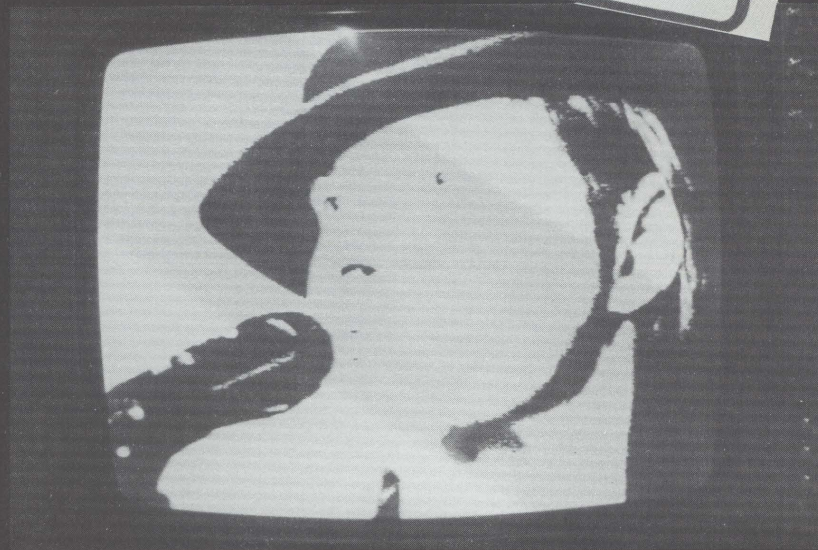
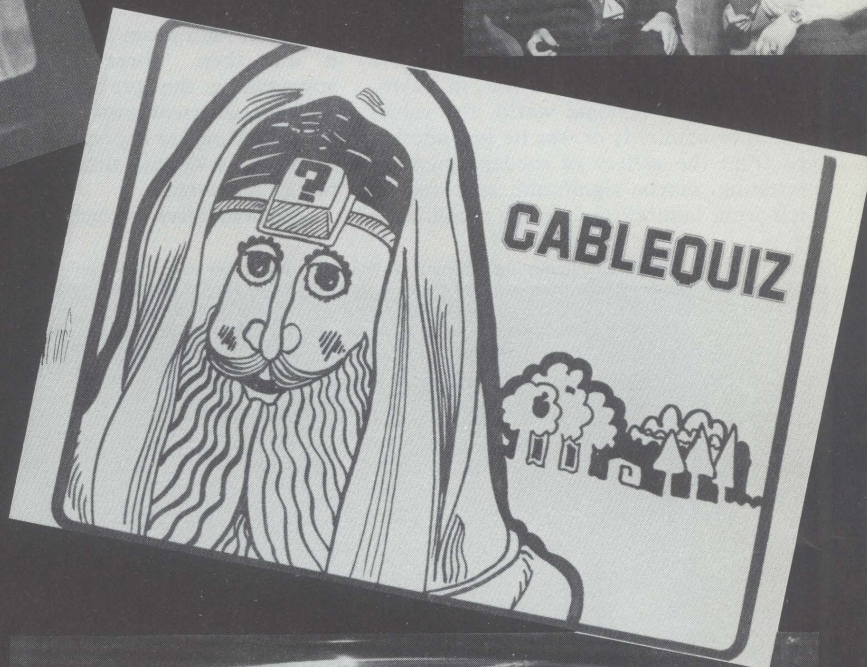


**The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*, by John McGrath, directed by John Mackenzie and shown on BBC-1, 6 June 1974.

LOCAL CABLE TELEVISION

Alternative
or Dead End?

Graham Wade



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CABLEVISION
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The subject of local cable television, or community or access TV as it has also been called, has found its way into the news columns with increasing regularity over the past few years, yet for most people it still remains an enigma. One reason for this confusion is that most of the coverage has been both shallow and partisan.

Any consideration of cable television must begin with the nature of cable itself. Essentially, cable is a means of distributing radio or television signals through wires as opposed to over the air: material is cablecast rather than broadcast. Cable networks were first constructed in Britain during the early 1920s for the relay of sound radio broadcasts, and with the spread of television after the Second World War these systems were inevitably converted to carry the new signals. A popular misconception is that cable started in North America and then moved across the Atlantic. In fact the reverse is true. All the experimental research for developing mass distribution of television signals through cable was carried out by British companies, and the first ever city-wide cable network for television was built by British Relay in Gloucester in 1951. Far more attention has been paid to the North American experience, and an array of literature about it has been churned out over the years, creating many myths along the way. Conversely, little has been written about British cable, and many people have not even been aware of its existence. To give the matter some perspective, it should be realised that in Britain today about two million households receive their television pictures through cable. This represents roughly ten per cent of the population.

Cable works in a relatively simple way. The network takes its television signals usually from a master aerial which gives signals of a very high quality, and these are then distributed through wires to individual television sets. Alternatively, the network can take its signals from a long distance land-line. In this way out-of-area signals can be brought in for the network. In both cases we are talking about broadcast television signals which are sent out from BBC or IBA transmitters. An added feature of cable is that it can often carry several separate signals at the same time. This means that even after having BBC-1, BBC-2, the local ITV channel and two out-of-area IBA channels on the cable, there may well remain another half dozen spare channels. Over the years consistent pressure has been applied by the Cable Television Association, a lobby group representing the most powerful cable operators, to persuade governments to allow non-broadcast use of this spare capacity. On the whole this campaign has fallen on deaf ears, although there have been exceptions, the most notable being the local cable television experiments of the 70s. Cable networks are strictly governed by a licensing system, administered until 1969 by the Postmaster General and subsequently by the appropriate minister (at present the Home Secretary) and the Post Office, which oversees all matters relating to telecommunications. These licences define what each cable network is allowed to carry.

At a simple level of analysis, the prime reason for the growth of cable television relay in Britain was an economic one: to maintain and develop the profitability of existing sound radio networks. The high capital outlay that had been made to establish these networks could not just be written off. But beyond this were other factors which influenced the investment of additional and substantial amounts of capital into the business of television relay, some of them not dissimilar from those which had encouraged the original radio cable networks to be established some thirty years before.

As the British television service rapidly progressed in the late 40s and 50s from the crawling to the walking stage, it encountered technical difficulties, not least the problem of transmitting good broadcast signals which could be received by anyone who wanted to pick them up. In those days everything was on VHF and coverage was often patchy, giving poor reception in some areas and none at all in others. So there was clearly a potential market for cable operators to work on. Cable could offer the relay of good quality broadcast pictures in areas where you could not obtain them with an ordinary roof aerial.

There is an intriguing but obvious corollary to this point: if people knew that viewable television pictures could not be had, they were not going to rush out to buy what in the 50s was an extremely expensive consumer durable. For the local electrical store owner, it was highly frustrating not to be able to sell sets because he was located in a poor reception area. Answers had to be found to combat this most logical form of consumer resistance.

One answer was the renting of TV sets, a factor which contributed to the huge increase in the number of homes with television in the late 50s.* To a lesser extent the same was true of cable, and a further link can be drawn: the names of the big cable companies are the same as those of the big rental companies—Radio Rentals, Redifusion, British Relay, Telefusion and so on. With these companies the customer often buys a convenient package deal, if he lives near or is 'touched' by an existing cable network operated by one of the companies. He rents not only the set, but also the signal relay.

Another reason for the spread of cable, although this has more substance in publicity handouts than anywhere else, concerns the amenity aspect. The argument runs that cable does not spoil the environment,

whereas clusters of roof-mounted aerials are unsightly. This has been a significant factor, though beyond the choice of the individual, with many local authority housing developments. Apart from reception problems associated with high-rise buildings, many councils have enforced bans on outside aerials and instead contracted out to private companies the concession of operating a cable network. There are similar schemes, on a far more limited scale, for private housing estates.

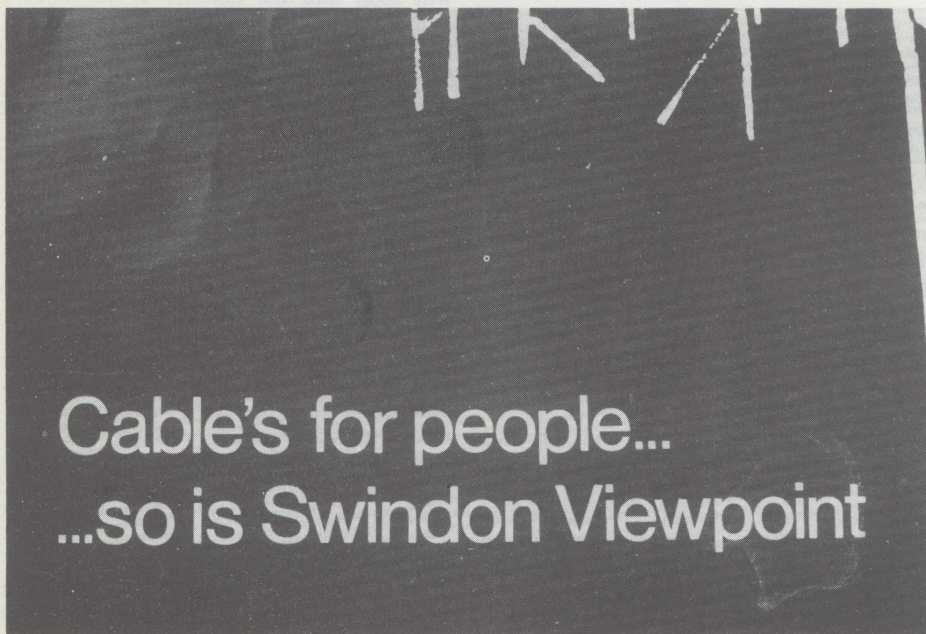
All these cable networks represent capital investments running into many millions of pounds, spread over more than fifty companies. But the cable story does not end there. By the late 60s virtually every household in Britain had a TV set. Since then transmission coverage has been further improved with a whole new generation of UHF repeater stations, so that overnight an area can have its broadcast reception transformed from the impossible to the near-perfect. A cable operator, particularly a small one, faced with a new, low-powered broadcast transmitter placed on his doorstep, will soon find his number of subscribers falling off, as several already have done. If the trend is a continuing one then his economic survival may be threatened.

All cable companies have seen this writing on the wall, and in recent years the fight has intensified to obtain permission for wider uses of cable in addition to broadcast relay. In its submission to the Annan Committee on the Future of Broadcasting (whose report is imminently expected), the Cable Television Association pushes the line that 'cable should be given the freedom to develop'—a generalisation which hardly disguises the cable companies' central objective of making profits. There is much talk of service to the public, of public information and educational channels; but in the end it comes down to what is known as pay or box-office television. This is the system where the cable operator offers a selection of special programmes to subscribers which have to be paid for on a collective or individual basis, usually through some kind of metering device. The material on offer would be of a big attraction type like a recent feature film or a championship boxing match.

A cable operation on these lines was the Pay-TV experiment of the mid-60s. A limited number of outlets produced inevitably inconclusive results, although Pay-TV Ltd. did believe that on an expanded basis the operation would become commercially viable. Permission for widening the project was, however, withheld by the Labour government, and pay TV made its exit from the British scene, although shouts for its return have been heard ever since.

The cable companies came to believe that pay TV was virtually their only possible salvation, but their demands included a variety of other projects. These were largely window dressing; but it was one of them, local television, to which the government gave an experimental licence in January 1972. A Tory Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, Christopher Chataway—reputedly against civil service opposition—granted a licence (to run until the Annan Committee's review of broadcasting) to Greenwich Cablevision, a small company in

*In 1950 there were 344,000 combined radio and television licences; by 1955 the figure was 4,504,000, and by 1960 it had risen to 10,470,000.



Production console at Rediffusion's Bristol studio; station message from Swindon

London. At the same time it was announced that further licences were on offer and applications would be welcome.

Several applications came in, and eventually licences were awarded to another four networks: Rediffusion in Bristol, British Relay in Sheffield, EMI in conjunction with Radio Rentals in Swindon and the Wellingborough Traders TV Relay. The terms of these licences were rather vague, similar to those governing the commercial broadcast TV companies under the IBA. The most specific requirement was that output should be 'specially designed to appeal to local tastes and interests.' There was no mention of access, participation or community television.

Before considering the individual experiments, it is necessary to look at the wider perspective. In the first place, it was of course a Conservative government which authorised the new licences; and it is widely believed (and I support this view) that there

was an unwritten gentleman's agreement between the government and the cable companies to the effect that the introduction of local television, which was not initially allowed to earn revenue (the local service had to be financed out of revenue from rentals), would be followed after a reasonable interval by rather more lucrative concessions.

The implicit promise of jam tomorrow was almost too much for many in the cable camp. An almost schoolboyish enthusiasm for what might be waiting round the corner could be easily detected. There was even wild talk of a second coming: a repeat of the financial killing which followed the launching of commercial television in 1955. Fond memories recalled that ATV shares issued in 1955 at one shilling each could be sold in 1958 for £12. These fantasies were perversely sustained in the knowledge that if something better were not pulled out of the bag pretty shortly then a steady economic decline was bound to follow. Local tele-

vision was embraced as a way out—or so it was seen at the time.

Another, somewhat separate element in this bizarre scenario concerns the type of technology these new mini-TV stations would be using. They would be unable to afford the exceedingly costly gear used in broadcast television production, and would have to buy low-gauge video equipment. (Broadcast TV operates on a standard of two-inch gauge video tape; the local experiments worked on half or at most one-inch tape.) Technically this means simply that picture reproduction is of a less high quality, but there is a more important point.

For a complex of reasons, low-gauge video, or just video as it is often misleadingly referred to, has become bound up with counter-culture ideology. Along with topics such as ecology and mysticism, it has become part of the rag-bag of ideas associated with the alternative society. The radical chic of low-gauge video grew up in North America, where the first relatively cheap, portable, half-inch video units (called Portapak for short) were marketed. The myths of guerrilla television and demystified people's TV, of 'video can solve your social problems', were soon formed and in turn survived the Atlantic crossing. They have had their influence on the British cable experiments mainly through the young workers who were recruited to operate the new stations.

In July 1972 Greenwich Cablevision was the first of the original five experiments to start putting its own locally originated television programmes down the cable. Since that date the whole undertaking has gone through many ups and downs. For the cable companies they have mostly been downs. In the first place the keenly felt anticipation for pay TV evaporated as it became clear that the required licences would not be issued. The final nail in this coffin was hammered home in the election of a Labour government in February 1974. Soon after taking office the government resurrected the Annan Committee; and because they would need considerable time to take and sift evidence, the deadline for the broadcasting review, then due for 1976, was extended until 1979. The licences for the local television experiments were also extended for another three years.

This move enraged the cable companies. Here they were paying out thousands of pounds for the experimental local television services, and they were unable to recoup a penny of it. They had expected money-spinning concessions at the very least in 1976. Now that this had been postponed and they were faced with a five-year wait, why should they bother to continue financing the experiments when there was no guarantee at the end of it that they would be given anything? In a sense the government had called their bluff, and the altruistic gestures in running the experiments were revealed for their true nature: loss-leader items aimed at capturing pay TV franchises. To add insult to injury the companies had also quickly realised that the new local services were not going to reverse the falling numbers of subscribers. Most people were not prepared to pay for cable just to receive the local channel—and the relay of broadcast TV, and often also radio signals. (The

cost of renting a cable connection without a TV set is in the region of 20-25p a week.)

On March 6 1975, after the virtual shut-down of Greenwich and the impending closures of Bristol and Wellingborough, the government relented a little at the request of the Annan Committee, whose brief included cable. It was announced that the cable stations would be allowed to take advertising on a local basis. This token was regarded as insufficient and too late. In the meantime the government had granted a sixth licence for local television to the Milton Keynes Development Corporation. This project planned to use a cable network owned by the Post Office, and marked a significant new development in that this was a publicly financed scheme, while all the rest had been privately backed by commercial interests. The Milton Keynes station, known as Channel 40, began cablecasting in December 1976.

During this most recent period the BBC has called off advanced plans for its own local television experiment in Stoke-on-Trent, using the spare fourth channel. The reason given was economy cuts. There was also a limited experiment for a six-week period conducted in the Vale of Leven area in Scotland. This local cable TV project was run by the government-sponsored Quality of Life experiment, aimed at helping depressed communities. One of several cable networks owned by Wolsey Television (Scotland) was lent free of charge for the distribution of programmes. Another feature of this period worth noting was the active interest shown by several local authorities in the possibility of setting up their own cable stations. These moves, however, were confined to the inquiry stage because of severely trimmed budgets.

So much for the background. We can now turn to the stations themselves. Greenwich Cablevision, the pioneer station, today operates a skeleton service for a few hours at weekends. It does not have a single full-time member of staff on the local TV side of the operation, and is mainly run by keen schoolboys who do it for the fun and a bit of pocket-money, although adults appear in front of the camera.

The key to the Greenwich set-up lies in its managing director, Maurice Townsend, an ebullient businessman who has made himself the central publicist for the expansion of commercial cable in Britain. Townsend spent four years as a sales manager in the Canadian electrical industry in the 60s and picked up a thorough knowledge of cable television. The Canadian connection reappears in the ownership of Greenwich Cablevision. The network was set up in 1963 by a cartel of television dealers to overcome low sales caused by poor aerial reception—no longer a problem since a new UHF repeater transmitter opened in Woolwich in 1974. If the network had remained in local hands it would probably have closed, but when Townsend arrived Greenwich Cablevision was bought out by Albion Cablevision, which is 75 per cent owned by Premier Cablevision, a large Canadian company. The remaining 25 per cent is owned by a British firm, Carriack Communications.

Although Greenwich Cablevision is a small network, with just over 10,000

subscribers, it has played a prominent role on the British cable front. It may be that the company's Canadian interests wanted a firm toe-hold on the starting line of any potential cable race in this country. The other outstanding feature of Greenwich was its rapid turnover in staff. With a staff maximum of about six at any time, the station managed to go through four different programme directors in its two-and-a-half years of full-time life. One element in this was the conflict between the views of younger workers and those of the buccaneering management. Another was the complaint of poor working conditions and lack of facilities. The entire staff of the local television side of Greenwich Cablevision received notices to quit at the end of 1974. Wisely, the management has not closed down the operation completely, leaving its options open for what a new government, or Annan, or both, may bring in the future. But except for the weekend programmes, Greenwich now puts out only shop-window advertisements without a single programme to break them up.



Video cameraman for Swindon Viewpoint

Swindon Viewpoint, the station operated by EMI using a Radio Rentals cable network, presents a more hopeful story. It is at least still functioning on a full-time basis. EMI's reason for entering the field was slightly different from the other examples because they have no direct cable network interests, which is why they had to use someone else's. Their involvement has been described as a long-term one, stemming from the close attention which this conglomerate pays to any new developments in the communications and entertainment industries. Whatever it was they wanted to find out they must have found it, because they pulled out of the project in 1976, the year the experiment was originally scheduled to end.

The encouraging twist to the story is that Swindon Viewpoint has managed to survive this traumatic experience, for the time being anyway. This has been due to the efforts of the small staff to raise money from alternative sources to keep what they regard as a worthwhile exercise from folding up. EMI graciously sold the station's holding company to a new board of directors elected from the community for a nominal one pound, and the equipment and vehicles are on free loan until 1979. The £60,000 needed to run Viewpoint for the current year has more or less been raised, from a wide variety of sources including Gulbenkian, Radio Ren-

tals and the Arts Council. Although the station had previously announced that it would not be taking up the government's offer of local advertising, the new situation has altered this view and it is hoped to earn about £5,000 this year from caption advertising. The network is relatively small, with around 10,000 outlets.

Richard Dunn, who had previously worked as an executive producer in EMI's special films unit, was Viewpoint's managing director until very recently. He sees the role of the station in this way: 'We could have said from the beginning that we wanted to be urban guerrillas: to produce social change at a conscious level. Equally we could have set out to be a conventional, flat, boring station and think that because we are producers with equipment then we must be near to God. We chose the strategy of being a neutral resource centre, and have consciously avoided instigating things ourselves.'

Sheffield Cablevision was the largest of the experiments, with about 30,000 homes on the cable, and it put out programmes from August 1973 until January 1976. It had about fifteen staff from a variety of backgrounds. In common with the other stations' employees, they had mostly worked in media or related jobs like cinema projectionist, pirate radio disc-jockey and TV researcher.

There were two distinct periods in Sheffield's history. The first reflected a policy rooted in the Reithian tradition of broadcasting, which was highly antagonistic to any kind of community television. A statement of the time said: 'Access and participation are irrelevant; you may like to tell it like it is, man, but no one will want to watch.' Then the station manager was replaced by John Brand, who had worked in BBC-2 presentation, and the emphasis shifted to more participatory programming. Brand viewed his job at Sheffield in this way: 'You have fifty years of brainwashing and indoctrination to overcome. It took the BBC that long to introduce one access programme which goes out very late-night on the minority channel. I have no intention of running a mini-BBC. On the other hand, you cannot throw out all the lessons that have been learned in that time. I am handing on those skills; a professional approach to a new area.' Faced with the imminent threat of closure, Brand tried to use the advertising concession as a way out. At the time he spoke of ambitious plans to raise tens of thousands of pounds in this way, using the station as a 'test-bed' for this new type of promotion. The bid failed to raise the cash and Sheffield Cablevision is no more.

Cablevision Wellingborough was the smallest of the experiments in several senses. It lasted only one year; it had the smallest staff (five), the smallest number of cable outlets (about 4,000), and the least money. In some ways Wellingborough shows striking similarities with Greenwich. The cable network was constructed in the late 50s by a group of electrical shop-owners to overcome poor local reception, since solved by a new transmitter in the area. In order to finance the local television experiment half of the original traders' company was sold to Selkirk Communications, a large Canadian group which also has a share in the London Broadcasting Company, one of London's commercial radio stations.

The Wellingborough operation was run on amateurishly conceived lines. The television production equipment was bought second-hand in a job lot. It was already well used and out of date and proved totally unsuited to its new use; unbelievably there was no editing facility, and virtually all the station's output was recorded before transmission. In the circumstances the station's workers, who were low-paid and put in long hours, produced some remarkable local television. Wellingborough's managing director blamed the Labour government for not saying 'you can do what you want to prove that your cable system can pay.' He put this down to Labour's natural antipathy to private enterprise; and in his view the Post Office Engineering Union had negatively influenced the situation in its attempt to gain a national monopoly of British cable systems.

Bristol Channel, the Rediffusion station, had most money spent on it, with a budget around the £80,000 a year mark when it closed in March 1975. At its peak the number of staff reached sixteen, and when the end arrived it was not without acrimony. This is best illustrated by a play, written by the late David Illingworth, which was put on at the station's close-down party. Called *The Bristol Channel Cabaret* and performed by the Avon Theatre Touring Company, this cynical entertainment presented a commentary on what had happened at Bristol. At the beginning a Rediffusion director sings: 'I've been musing about cablevision / As a future investment you see / In the interests of all of the nation / But first in the interest of me.' The play ended with a call for workers to take over the station and run it themselves, but this never occurred.

Bristol exhibited some of the best and worst local television. Its Knowle West project, which involved placing a permanent station worker on a council estate in Bristol with a Portapak, has been widely acclaimed as one of the most successful community television exercises yet seen in Britain. On the other hand Bristol Channel also put out some of the most stale material—particularly its evening newscasts, which amounted to a poor man's copy of the BBC's *Nation-wide*.

There is not space here to discuss in detail the programming, types of production and audience reaction to the material produced and transmitted by the five stations. However, one or two points can be made. The programmes always had a local connection—a requirement written into the operating licence—and each station had regularly to submit its programme schedules to the Home Office for examination. One of the few instances of intervention involved a request to put back a programme so that it did not offer an alternative to a party political broadcast going out on the three main channels. The few cases of censorship that have come to notice were self-administered by the station managers themselves.

Programme costs were negligible in conventional television terms. Apart from the cost of the equipment, the video-tape and the wages of the full-time staff, only odd out-of-pocket expenses were allowed. Members of the public always gave their services voluntarily; and by the very nature of the financial base there was anyway never much

money available. The programme costs for Bristol Channel, one of the larger stations, for the whole of March 1974, were only £400, excluding video-tape and news agency service. During that period 30 hours of material was transmitted.

On average each station produced about six hours original material each week, giving a rough worker-output ratio of one hour's television per worker per week, which is remarkably high. Needless to say, without expensive equipment, time and big budgets, the cable stations did not manage to produce slick, glossy television, but on occasion they did achieve a close identity with individuals in the communities they served. One worker I spoke to described his station's work in this way: 'We help people to help themselves; we're not here to solve problems for them. Our first reaction to someone who arrives in the studio with a problem is to get them to make their own programme. The most difficult thing is to convince people that they are capable of standing in front of or behind a camera and doing the job well. They still have this great fear of TV—we're trying to get rid of some of the mystery surrounding it.'

Taking a week's programmes at random from Swindon Viewpoint's schedule for early 1975 will give some idea of what viewers could see on their local channels. Viewpoint's output for that week was in three transmissions, and each of these was repeated once. The first segment, with the umbrella title *This is Swindon*, was made up of these items: excerpt from a concert at the Wyvern Theatre; an old age pensioners' party; local folksingers; rock group; football match; *Swindon Steps Ahead*, a film from the Civic Office; and pieces of continuity linking. The second segment, *Forum*, had: 'The Jobs Threat', about redundancies at a local factory; a councillor on the employment situation; an interview with a representative of the Festival of Light; and a sequence on a Mother and Toddler Club. The third selection, *The Seven Day Hour*, included local cinema information; *Adverscan*, the week's news presented by the local newspaper; Community Health Council; theatre news by the theatre's PRO; police information by the police; local sports; professional football by local team manager; and *Diary Dates*, about forthcoming events. The relentlessly local nature of the material is unmistakable.

Of all the local tapes I have seen, the best, amounting to around five per cent of the total, have been examples of local people making their own programmes about themselves or about something which concerns them. I remember a programme from Sheffield called *Women and Children Last*, which is a good illustration of the point. It took four mothers some five months to produce, and after editing ran 22 minutes. It presented simply and directly the problems faced by people, especially women with young children, shopping in the centre of Sheffield. It was shot entirely on location with some stills linking material, and included a day's shooting in Nottingham to compare facilities. It portrayed the difficulties experienced with precision and wit, which only a victim could bring to it. The same women's group, albeit a middle-class one, went on to tackle a project on private child-minders and state nurseries, a subject

of strong local interest. This type of programme is the acceptable face of cable television.

As far as audience response is concerned, very little is known since there have been virtually no systematic studies, with the exception of one at Swindon. Here it was found that the most likely viewer was male, under thirty and from the skilled working-class, although it would be dangerous to generalise from this one survey. One thing is reasonably certain, though: audiences for the local programmes tend to be small.

If any lessons can be drawn from these experiments, the clearest must be that ailing private enterprises do not mix well with the idea of local or community television. The fact that Swindon Viewpoint is the only real survivor shows that finance for such projects must come largely from foundation grants or local authorities. In this sense many eyes are turned towards the new station at Milton Keynes, Channel 40, to see how it performs on a completely public finance base. Channel 40 is run by Michael Barrett, who used to work as the access producer at Swindon Viewpoint. He believes that the new station is fundamentally different from previous experiments not only in terms of finance but also because 'we start with the idea of open access at the core of what we are doing. Whereas others have been set up to provide some kind of local TV service with the direct access function added on as an afterthought. We have that resource role at the centre of what we are doing.'

The major question, however, is whether the concept of local or community television is a useful or worthwhile one. It seems to me that its validity lies more in the benefits gained by ordinary people in making their own television than in any advantages it may have for an audience. It is also true that each of the projects mentioned has produced individual pieces of television with a degree of feeling and insight that broadcast television methods could perhaps never achieve. The great mistake, which has been made so often, is in producing television which is little more than a moving local newspaper, complete with its birth, marriage and death columns. If the trite and superficial elements of local television can be avoided, or at least kept to a bare minimum, and the communities around them are allowed genuine access and participation, then almost certainly it is an idea worth pursuing.

It is important that in all areas of communication and culture the marked imbalance between the individual and the organisation, whether it be privately owned or state controlled, is made less extreme. The ideas expressed in the manifesto written for the Centre Forty-two project at the Roundhouse in London in 1961 have a contemporary relevance which includes cable television but also extends far beyond it: '... if we do not succeed [in redressing this imbalance] then a vast army of highly powered commercial enterprises are going to sweep into the leisure hours of future generations and create a cultural mediocrity the result of which can only be a nation emotionally and intellectually immature, capable of enjoying nothing, creating nothing, and effecting nothing...'

'People are always looking for—I don't know what you'd call it—I guess, the cosmic entertainment. More than the meteorological explanation. From the behavioural science point of view, I was just as interested in finding out why people looked to the skies, and want to believe, as I was in looking to the skies myself, to try to understand what's happening up there, that the Air Force and the Government don't want to tell us about.'

After his tussle with the deep in *Jaws*, Steven Spielberg has turned his eyes heavenward, and the result, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, a contemporary story of 'science speculation' dealing with the UFO phenomenon, will be seen later this year. At the time this interview was recorded, one important scene remained to be shot, in Bombay, with François Truffaut (appearing for the first time in a film not directed by himself). 'The Indian scene is his, in a central plot twist. Without that scene, the Truffaut character doesn't make much sense.' About the scene or the character, however, Spielberg would say no more; security is still being maintained as tightly about the actual content of the movie, and the nature of its speculations, as it was during shooting around the unit's main base in Mobile, Alabama.

STEVEN SPIELBERG: We have quite a large set. The production designer showed me that the model he had built, and that I had subsequently fallen in love with, was four times larger than the largest sound stage at

MGM or Cinecittà. And the only alternatives were to shoot it outside, where I'd have no control over the weather, and shoot at night which is very costly, or to find a dirigible hangar somewhere. I wanted to

use Kubrick's hangar, until I found it has a lot of main beams running down the centre; and the only two available hangars were in Oregon and the one in Mobile. It's at a defunct and demilitarised Air Force base—there are weeds growing out of the tarmac. The entire base was cordoned off. We hired security police and built a small kiosk. And the two hangars that we used began to resemble motion picture studios. We had to administer picture IDs that were coded, so you couldn't go down to the local newspaper, fake one and try to get in that way. The *Washington Post* tried everything to get on to our set. Their reporter, who likened himself to Bob Woodward, decided that the best way to break our security was to interview some of the extras at night in bars, when they're loose and fancy-free, and then write his story in the first person, as though he had been there reporting the whole thing himself. It was printed, and it was the most erroneous, far-fetched encounter of the fifth kind I had ever read. But he made it sound even more intriguing to the general reader, because by not knowing what he was talking about, he wrote a very interesting story.

But despite the secrecy, your film is not dealing with the futuristic paraphernalia of 2001, for example?

It covers in spirit the thirty years of the UFO controversy, but in actual screen time it's a contemporary film. If you believe,

Richard Combs

PRIMAL SCREAM

An interview with Steven Spielberg

Close encounter: Spielberg and Truffaut



it's science fact; if you don't believe, it's science fiction. I'm an agnostic between the two beliefs, so for me it's science speculation. It's not ten light years away, it's right in the heart of American suburbia.

Did the story come from any particular incident?

Nothing that ever happened to me. It was a compendium of research I had done. I read everything on the market, including the clippings from the *National Inquirer* and the wire services, and even tried to get into the Blue Book archives, long before the project was declassified, to no avail. I was mainly inspired when I began to meet people who had had experiences, and I realised that just about every fifth person I talked to had looked up at the sky at some point in their lives, and seen something that was not easy to explain. And then I began meeting people who had had close encounters of the second kind, where undeniably something quite phenomenal was happening right before their eyes. It was this direct contact, the interviews, that got me interested in making the movie. I interviewed enough people to know that all of them could not possibly be lying. A lot of the sightings people have at night are because they never look and are just discovering the sky; so many reports are easy to explain astronomically, conventionally. There are other reports that are impossible to describe conventionally, but the basic scientific community isn't ready to change Einstein's rules.

And close encounters of the third kind?

That's when you meet them. It's much more outspoken in Europe than it is in America, where there's a sort of hush-hush about these things that go bump in the night. Somehow, in Brazil, in France, in Italy, throughout South America, there's much more open-mindedness and a general acceptance—there's less scientific scepticism. In America, how can UFOs exist over the sky when Phyllis and Maud and all the

family are on television at the same time? When do people go outside and look up any more?

Are there many reported instances of the third kind?

There have been hundreds. Betty and Barney Hill, the interracial couple from New Hampshire, had that experience when they were taken aboard a space craft. They were allegedly both given thorough physical examinations, Betty communicated with some of the entities in the vehicle, and then they forgot the entire episode completely. They spent two years having a horrendous time with each other and their marriage, persistent nightmares. Then they went to a psychiatrist, and separately they were put under hypnosis and were able to piece together what happened during those three missing hours, when they suddenly noticed they were ninety miles further down the road. There's a book on it by John C. Fuller called *The Interrupted Journey*; it was also the basis of a television movie.

The contact was that Betty was shown a star map with a configuration of broken lines and solid lines, and different points which she didn't attempt to memorize but which she looked at very carefully. 'They' explained to her that the broken lines were trade routes and the solid lines were expeditionary routes, and under hypnosis she reproduced the map. When it was published in this book in the mid-60s, no one could figure out what the hell the map meant. And then three or four years later, four crucial stars were discovered by our most advanced telescopes, and those stars completed Betty's map. They were able to find the exact duplicate of her map existing up there.

You mentioned the secretiveness of the government and the Air Force about UFOs. Does the film make any connection between the growing incidence of UFO sightings and feelings of political paranoia, a sort of science fiction version of *The Parallax View*?

It does and it doesn't. In a way, it shows the kind of Swiss precision of covert operations in the U.S. today, as they deal with campus unrest, and the Red menace, and also UFOs. It's all really part of the same thing. The government's position on UFOs has been covert and just very secretive over the last thirty years. They could have saved a lot of money by simply telling the public that they were experimenting with the SR 71, let's say, before it was put in the skies as our new supersonic spy plane. It would have been easy for the government to come right out and tell the public that the things you see in the night sky over your back yards are super-secret terrestrial vehicles being tested. But the government isn't saying things like that, and it's not willing to say things like that. The U.S. is a policy-ridden country, and in 1947, after Kenneth Arnold sees those twelve silvery discs—Arnold coined the term 'flying saucer'—the government sets a policy that this is not to be discussed among the scientific community or professional officers of the U.S. Air Force, and for thirty years, unless there's a directive from the White House that rescinds that order, people are going to follow it to the letter. It's just the nature, the structure of the U.S.

The Parallax View was the most paranoid movie I've ever seen, next to *Mickey One*. This movie's more like *The French Connection*, as brutally realistic within a dramatic story-telling structure. I think our film does to UFOs what *The French Connection* said about crime in the streets and narcotics and New York city. It's more of a movie than it is a film, really. It's quite entertaining and it's about people and not about events, but it's about people who are innocent until they are ensnared by the event, and then have to rise above it.

How did you work with Truffaut? Was language a problem?

He speaks English well enough to communicate, though he feels that he doesn't speak English as well as he'd like. He'd been taking some lessons with his private instructor at the Berlitz School. So in our movie there are actually scenes where, while he sleeps in different motels across the country, he plays a tape-recording of this Berlitz lesson.

Truffaut was my first choice all along, but I didn't have the courage to phone him up and ask the great French director if he would be in this newcomer's movie. I put it off. I had a meeting with Lino Ventura; I didn't contact Trintignant but I expressed interest in him; I expressed interest in Philippe Noiret. After a while I decided that I really wanted François Truffaut, and the best thing to do was to call him up at home. He said yes for various reasons. I don't think particularly because he enjoyed or understood the script that well, but because the timing is right. He's preparing a book called *The Actor*, and he wanted to experience the hardships of waking up at six o'clock in the morning to stand around seven hours, to work under pressure the last hour and a half, for another director. And, my God, he sure learned fast.

Is a film like this completely pre-planned?

In that respect it was exactly like *Jaws*. Every set-piece was sketched, I had hundreds

Steven Spielberg and his crew at sea for 'Jaws'



of little drawings, I pre-cut the entire film and then shot it to cut later. There are moments with the people when they improvise and go beyond the script. Essentially I'm not a writer and I don't enjoy writing. I'd much rather collaborate. I need fresh ideas coming to me, because I can't send ideas out into space and expect them to return, I need them to bounce off something. So I locked myself away to write *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, and when I came out I had a pretty good structure but I wasn't crazy about some of the characters. The actors helped me shake out the fat and get right down to what the scene was about—essentially the same thing I did on *Jaws*. We would find the theme of each scene, we would do improvisations about that theme (I had a tape-recorder running), then I'd quickly run to the typewriter, find the best lines, and rewrite the scene so that the next morning the actors had a written script based on some loose improvisations the night before.

Does that method create any problems with the producers of such expensive films?

For some strange reason I got away with murder on *Jaws*. They just left me alone. I changed the script every day, but I never received a telephone call from any of the powerful executives on the West Coast. I don't think anybody was ever in love with any of the screenplays, and felt that the story and script could only be improved.

I chose to make a movie that would reach audiences really on two levels. The first level was a blow to the solar plexus, and the second was an uppercut, just under the nose; it was really a one-two you're out combination. I never intended anything deeper than that, because when I read the book I had a lot of fun, and when I began reworking the screenplay I had even more fun. And I really said, I'm going to make a primal scream movie.

One of the most interesting analyses of the movie was 'The Last Bastion of the Ecological Sergeant-at-Arms'. You've got man controlling the environment inland, building artificial lakes by blocking off natural dams, and suddenly you've got this sentry out in the ocean saying, stop, Mr. Cousteau, go no further. It's our turn to fight you. When I first got involved in the project, the thing that terrified me most was the idea that there's something else out there, that has a digestive system with intake; and the whole idea of being on somebody else's menu was just utterly horrifying. It was a horrifying thought to be part of a food chain. *Jaws* is a raw nerve movie, it's just baring your nerves and saying this is about the birth sac, you swim around in yourself.

That's why I like parts of *Duel* much better than I like parts of *Jaws*, because *Duel* was more daring. It was about a very unnatural occurrence, whereas *Jaws* is as natural as the evolution of mankind. *Duel* was much more of a challenge, because trying to create that kind of fear out of a truck is a lot harder than the established fear of a man-eating fish underwater. But *Duel* had a whole new set of rules.

Do you have a strong sense of the similarities between your films, of any kind of stylistic continuity?

I can certainly see a pattern and a simi-

larity between *Duel* and *Jaws*, a similarity between *The Sugarland Express* and a film I'm about to begin. But as far as style within a body of work is concerned, I'm a little too subjective to have feelings about that. What I'm fighting is believing my own journalism, and just trying to form my own opinions about myself. I don't think I've made enough films to do that yet, and most of my films haven't been as personal as I think I am to myself.

The film-maker who really influenced me more than any other is John Frankenheimer. Not visually but as an editor. His editing often has more energy than the content of the story. When I saw *The Manchurian Candidate*, I realised for the first time what film editing was all about. After that, I made a number of 8mm films at home and began to experiment with cutting and juxtaposing scenes and tricks in the cutting room. I learned all the negative things, the things I try not to do in movies, from television. One thing I learned from TV was that there was nothing worse than a close-up that's from the chin to the forehead. I remember watching *Paths of Glory* and realising how few tight close-ups there were, but when Kubrick used a close-up it meant something.

I think *Badlands* and *Barry Lyndon* are very similar films in terms of starring the period and mood of the film, the way the film feels between your fingers, over what you tell your friends it's about. I like *Barry Lyndon*, but for me it was like going through the Prado without lunch. And when Terrence Malick's film was over, I really felt as though I was covered with dust and my hair was greasy and I felt like taking a shower. I'm just the opposite, I think, in terms of the films I'm making. Sometimes I'll completely forfeit style for content. That's why I feel that *Jaws* does not have a style. *Jaws* is all content, experiment. *Jaws* is almost like I'm directing the audience with an electric cattle prod. I have very mixed feelings about my work on that picture, and two or three pictures from now I'm going to be able to look back on it and see what I've done. I saw it again and realised it was the simplest movie I had ever seen in my life. It was just the essential moving, working parts of suspense and terror, with just enough character development that at one point in the movie you hate Scheider and you hate Shaw and you hate Dreyfuss, within the roles they're playing, and then you like them again.

We would get into these very deep conversations about everyone's motivation, and why they were born to fight the shark, and go out next morning and kiss their wives goodbye and duel with the deep. And then I saw the movie last week and realised that what we were talking about were the basic primitive instincts man has about things that he doesn't understand and is afraid of. We were talking about things that go bump in the night.

I could have made that a very subtle movie if I wanted to. I could have done a lot of things to make it much more appealing to the way I think at night as opposed to the way I think on a sound stage. I think in a way I'm two different people; my instincts always commandeer my sensibilities, or my intellect is always beaten down by my instincts. ■

Nicolas Roeg

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reacts to what he sees in the slide and runs out of the house as his daughter sinks into the pond. Baxter goes into the pond to pull her body out. In the house, Laura picks up the slide and throws it over his book, *Beyond the Fragile Geometry of Space*. We see further close-ups of the bleeding, blistering slide as Baxter drags his daughter's body out of the pond. The sequence ends as Laura gives a terrifying scream which is carried to the next shot, a drill going through a stone wall in Venice.

Roeg has created his own geometry of space, a visual-aural field in which many signifiers are gathered and connected. These signifiers are composed and arranged to create a network of dread and foreboding. The sign structure of *Don't Look Now* does, on one level, signify mysteries of the occult, of ESP, just as the structure of *The Man Who Fell to Earth* signifies, on one level, the rise to and fall from power of a space visitor. But this level of meaning is scattered and incomplete, and the more permanent meaning of Roeg's texts is perception itself. *Don't Look Now* is 'about' a character trying to integrate what he sees and feels and, even more, about an audience reacting to a field of signs.

John Baxter fails at this task of perceptual integration, but the audience succeeds, at least to the extent that, unlike the character in the fiction, we survive and continue to consider the text. In *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, Newton, the most alien of Roeg's wanderers, is more successful, perhaps because the field he explores bears no relation to what he knows. He is free from the codes and conventions which trip up Roeg's more earthbound characters. Certainly Newton ends up thoroughly betrayed by everything he has experienced; but unlike Chas and Turner, unlike the young aborigine in *Walkabout*, unlike Baxter, Newton ends up alive and with more understanding of what he has seen than the other characters. Conversely, the audience understands less. In trying to apply the familiar codes of film narrative to the fractured and compressed action of *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, it is we who are cast out and left without a conclusive understanding of cause, effect or motivation.

Earlier I questioned in passing the ideological implications of the fact that Roeg's texts signify only themselves. It is true that, difficult as they are formally, the films tend to remain neat bourgeois entertainments which probe little more than narrative structure. The apparent tacit acceptance of the corporate system and the despicable behaviour of those who participate in it makes *The Man Who Fell to Earth* a little uncomfortable to deal with. Roeg shows no great political concern on this level. But he is deeply concerned with the politics of narrative. He is concerned with breaking down the easy conventions of realism and therefore shares in the tradition of Brecht and Godard. His lack of ideological passion makes him a lesser artist. But as of now he is one of the few commercial film-makers attacking the smugness and lethargy of the closed, consumable text. For that, attention must be paid. ■



'The Ministry of Fear': 'the slowly ascending and still ominous inspector . . .'

"The Germans are wonderfully thorough," Johns said. "They did that in their own country . . . It wouldn't surprise me if they'd done the same thing over here. They formed, you know, a kind of Ministry of Fear—with the most efficient under-secretaries. It isn't only that they get a hold on certain people. It's the general atmosphere they spread, so that you feel you can't depend on a soul." —Graham Greene, 'The Ministry of Fear', 1943

We last saw Fritz Lang warmed by the resignation of experience and the sunshine of Capri. He was playing a veteran, benign and philosophising movie director. *Le Mépris* is sometimes regarded as an affectionate tribute to Lang. But it is not the most fitting homage, and the fragments of an *Odyssey* that Godard supplied for it could not have been made by Lang. They are playful and offhand, while Lang in his work was never spontaneous.

As *Le Mépris* ends, the writer (Michel Piccoli), who has lost integrity and a wife, says farewell to the director, filming from a balcony overlooking the sea. The scene is a rapture, although even in 1963 Godard was setting natural unity against human compromises. But in the cinema, and in Lang's cinema more than most, appearances are unavoidable. The ending is filled with the radiant horizontals of sky and sea that lighten the tragedy in *Pierrot le Fou*. Lang's

David Thomson

Lang's Ministry

words bring the film to a close—"One has to finish what one has started"—and for a moment this suggests a faith in continuity and life worthy of Renoir.

Renoir would have been happier than Lang with that airy place, the sunlight and Coutard as a camera operator. Images so brimming with natural beauty are rare in Lang's work. But would Renoir have accepted Godard's pious slogan—so solemn when first heard, so hollow on reflection? In Renoir's films, events do not always go on bravely. In *La Règle du Jeu*, ridiculous disaster curtails the house party, and on another balcony Dalió regrets that there has been an accident and sends his guests indoors to pack. That game is stopped when man draws back in dismay. In some circumstances, it is more humane to discontinue a venture, to change one's mind. The blind determination to finish whatever one starts shirks responsibility. It is a credo for weaklings and tyrants, and it clings to an idealised, determined fate, against which man is a frail creature attached to the arms of a compulsive clock.

Le Mépris elevates Lang; he is the one admired figure in a disenchanted movie.

Godard led the young Frenchmen who fashioned cinematic hero-worship and hatred, defined them in the *politique des auteurs*, and then himself grew to resemble someone who had to be hero, madman, or both—Jean-Luc le Fou. The sunlight is as unbecoming to Lang as the unambiguous respect. He needs to be examined more sceptically, even if the enquiry eventually becomes wary of the cinema. He is a great director, but hardly an encouraging man. He and Hitchcock demonstrate how far talent alone, without an equal richness of humanity, can thrive in cinema. Lang's greatness is as primed with traps and ambushes as are his films. The atmosphere he spread was one of insecurity and unreliability. In *Le Mépris*, Godard has him quote Brecht. It suggests that Godard would say anything in a film if it rang like a slogan:

Every morning, to earn my bread
I go to the market where lies are bought.
Hopefully
I queue up among the sellers.

Oddly, when Lang's director owns up to the commercial imperative with this bitter-sweet equivocation, it seems a noble trade.

Whereas the writer is presented as someone who has ruinously prostituted himself—writing foolish scripts for tainted money and letting his wife's sex secure his job. Brecht's poem is now judged 'famous', as if it isolated the truth of the grubby film business. But Brecht was not so well acquainted with any market to justify the sanctimoniousness of the verdict. Lang, though, frequented the market all his working life, grumbling about producers but riding with their ignorant power just as the director suffers Jack Palance's wilful authority in *Le Mépris*.

So the poem is a homily. But it is bizarre that Lang should mouth it. Twenty years previously he had been involved with Brecht on *Hangmen Also Die*. Then, he saw that Brecht's laboured and simplistic outline was not suited to industrial melodrama and—when the crunch came—himself slashed and remade Brecht's story into a workable script. Lotte Eisner's new study of Lang,* admiring though it is, cannot disguise Brecht's contempt for his director's trimming. Yet that history is not referred to in *Le Mépris*, even if it is a more realistic instance of compromise than Michel Piccoli is supposed to have allowed in the film.

Instead, Godard reiterates the orthodox view of Lang's life—that, like any self-respecting man and artist, he fled Hitlerism for the bracing risks of liberty—leaving wife and money behind in Germany. That heroic legend overlooks one awkward dilemma arising from the fateful interview with Goebbels. What was it in Lang's work that Hitler and Goebbels so appreciated that they wanted him to lead the Nazi film industry? Fatal proficiency, and an eye for destiny?

The Ministry of Fear was published in 1943, and filmed by Paramount the following year. Graham Greene called it an 'entertainment' but the book is overcast with pity, guilt, treachery and violence, and the nerve-racking background of London during the blitz. It is an uneven book, sometimes less plausible than the film, and harder to follow. But it shivers with pathos and pain, and is only ruefully described as an entertainment. Its central character is Arthur Rowe, a fading, distraught man, alone and displaced in London, unable to participate in the war. He has just enough money for shabbiness, no job, and no place in the army or civil defence. He is haunted by the mercy-killing of his wife, by the pity that made him buy the poison she used and the guilt, or self-pity, that prevents him from overcoming the memory. He is a gloomy wreck, as neurotic as a beleaguered city fearful of spies.

The actions of the novel are not too different from those of the film, but their resonance is quite altered. The nature of that change bears out the dynamism of cinema and begins to explain Lang's unique coldness. The novel lives in Rowe's mind, and the exactness of observation, allied to harrowed sensibility, recurs in many of Greene's books. That distressed vision is matter-of-fact but hallucinatory. Rowe wins a cake at a fête. The cake con-

tains microfilm meant for a spy. By winning, Rowe becomes victim of a group of spies. Haplessly, he submits to their cunning plots, most of which are used in the film: a séance where he is made to believe he has killed a man; the murder of a private detective he hires; the confusing help of an Austrian couple, brother and sister, who run an organisation called the Mothers of the Free Nations; and an assignment to deliver a suitcase of books in which the destination proves an empty flat, and the case a bomb that explodes when opened.*

Rowe is devastated by the blast. His memory gone, he is taken to a rural clinic run by Dr. Forester, psychoanalyst to the Ministry of Information, but a member of the spy ring. Fragments of the past come back to him, but not enough to forsake Forester's imprisoning care, until the childishly reduced Rowe feels the tyranny of Forester's regime, and takes pity on another inmate. He runs away, goes to the police, and slowly the intrigue is unravelled and his identity restored. While ill, he has found a shy love with the sister, Anna Hilfe (called Carla in the film), a relationship that is sketched in delicately and with the emotional hunger of an invalid in search of a cure. Anna's love for him is compassion for his reduced and anguished state. But Anna's brother was in the spy ring, and he kills himself, casting a further blight of pity back on Rowe's love. The novel ends with this demanding passage; the mystery story clarified, but emotional existence more tortuous than ever:

"My dear," he said, "my dear. How much I love you." He was pledging both of them to a lifetime of lies, but only he knew that.

"Me too," she said. "Me too."

"They sat for a long while without moving and without speaking; they were on the edge of their ordeal, like two explorers who see at last from the summit of the range the enormous dangerous plain. They had to tread carefully for a lifetime, never speak without thinking twice; they must watch each other like enemies because they loved each other so much. They would never know what it was not to be afraid of being found out. It occurred to him that perhaps after all one could atone even to the dead if one suffered for the living enough.

"He tried tentatively a phrase, "My dear, my dear, I am so happy," and heard with infinite tenderness her prompt and guarded reply, "Me too." It seemed to him that after all one could exaggerate the value of happiness."

Lang liked the novel as soon as he read it, and 'wanted to buy the book, but Paramount had more money so they bought it.' Commentaries on Lang assume that the director responded to parts of himself in the book: the opportunity to make an anti-Nazi statement; the role of the Austrian exiles—for Lang himself was Viennese; the nightmare city bombed from the skies and unsure of its own inhabitants; the activities of spies; a man beset by guilt and in search of justice; and all the melodramatic set-pieces that Greene had invented for the original. Yet what distinguishes the book is

*In retrospect, this case, which hisses and flares before it explodes, is like the box opened at the end of Aldrich's *Kiss Me Deadly*. Lang often conveyed the emotional horror of blast—e.g. *The Big Heat*.

espionage infiltrating an emotional relationship—"They would never know what it was not to be afraid of being found out"—and that is not hinted at in Lang's film. To him, fear is a reaction to bombs, conspiracy and fate; but for Greene, the gravest fear is triggered by one's own feelings and soul.

Paramount, I wouldn't wonder, bought the title—the most entertaining flourish to the book, and worth that many dollars at the box-office. Few front-office men would have tolerated or fathomed the dense plot, with changes of names, dream sequences and subjective amnesia. The project was assigned to, or eagerly adopted by, Seton Miller, an experienced screenwriter, who both produced and wrote the screenplay for *The Ministry of Fear*. Lang was hired to direct—possibly because Miller knew of his interest in the book—and the director signed up. 'But when I . . . saw what had been done with the script, I was terribly shocked and I said "I want to get out of this contract." The agent said I couldn't—maybe he was just too lazy—I don't know. Anyway, I had signed a contract and I had to fulfil it, that's all.'

That is from the long interview Lang gave Peter Bogdanovich and which was published in 1967. Like many other interviews with celebrated *auteurs*, it is a kindly job that allows Lang to wander from points and turns a blind eye to the gap between the director's ideas and the most fervent readings of his films. As with Hitchcock, so Lang in interviews has not bothered to conceal his interest in commercial success, and never appeared other than a shrewd, ingenious entertainer. I am not complaining, but I think it is time film appreciation admitted that a majority of directors open their mouths to disclose uncomplicated and commonplace thoughts.

Lang's dismissal of the film could spring from its reception, arguments with Miller which he lost, or frustration at being denied a part in the scripting and seeing his early scheme for it 'spoiled' by Miller's adaptation. But I cannot accept that the screenplay is bad, or the film forgettable. Miller eliminated depth, emotional texture and Rowe's agony from the original and produced a fluent machine for filming in which eventfulness replaces reflection as the mainstream. It lacks subtlety of character and motive, but that places it with Lang's best work. It is a model screenplay loaded with incidents that his unrivalled eye will realise on screen. For Lang's quality is a narrow but intense visualisation of action conveying fear, claustrophobia and malign fate. And the most frightening thing in the film is that unmitigated conception and authority. The film is itself like a product of the Ministry it ostensibly hates.

The film begins with a swinging pendulum, upon which we see the credits. The camera draws back from the clock—on the brink of midnight—in the first exquisitely angled revelation of an interior: a darkened room with door, clock and window on one wall, the line of a bed, and the back view of a man intent upon the clock. The spatial enclosure would not be so arresting if the diagonals of the camera's path and the man's line of sight were not the sides of an isosceles triangle. The man's line of concentration—the path he must follow from midnight on—is immediately indicated

*Lotte H. Eisner, *Fritz Lang*, ed. David Robinson (Secker & Warburg, £9.75).



Images from the opening sequence, in which Stephen Neale (Ray Milland) is released from the asylum

when the door opens, another man appears on the illuminated threshold and a beam of light falls towards the seated man.

This man is Stephen Neale—that much more emphatic a name than Arthur Rowe—and he is played by Ray Milland. There will be no exploration of his character, no recesses or subtleties to match the designs Lang sees in interiors. Instead, Milland simply but usefully presents the surface of a handsome, uneasy hero. He is a meek vessel for neurotic apprehensiveness; more vitally, he is the vulnerable element in oppressive compositions. Milland is suited to this part, but one does not come to Lang for layered acting. If the director himself was often autocratic and withdrawn from actors, it follows that many of the parts in his films could be played by any number of people.

The girl in *The Ministry of Fear*, Marjorie Reynolds, is so much a stand-in because Lang is content with physical presences who will stand in the shapes he devises. Brian Donlevy in *Hangmen Also Die* is very limited but adequate, and in all Lang's work there are hardly any outstanding performances, only passing moments of vivid gesture, tone or glance—Dan Duryea in *Ministry of Fear*, Joan Bennett in four films, Gloria Grahame in two, Edward G. Robinson as an undermined gentleman, Spencer Tracy scorched by outrage in *Fury*. These are less characters than facets of types. Even the one example of histrionics under Lang—Peter Lorre in

M—is a *tour de force* chilled by the film's detached scrutiny, arousing curiosity rather than compassion. Lang's people are trapped specimens, evidence of the species. David Wayne in Losey's *M* is a heart-rending individual, whereas Lorre's murderer is a test-case of man with the pendulum of split personality working within him.

At midnight, Milland is a free man. The other man has come to 'release' him, and the dark room is akin to a cell, even if its exact nature is not yet specified. In Lang's films, interiors are atmospheric geometry before they are a home for anyone. Later in *Ministry of Fear*, Milland and the girl come to an apartment which they realise is an unoccupied trap—but it is only as un-owned as every other interior in the movie. The precious home in *The Big Heat*—though shaken by the bomb outside—is as neutral as an advertisement living room. Joan Bennett's rooms in *Woman in the Window* and *Scarlet Street* are dens from schoolboy dreams. *Rancho Notorious* is found in the cardboard Rockies. The hotel in *The 1000 Eyes of Dr. Mabuse* is a laboratory rat community, and *Metropolis* is a lonely child's model of the world.

This is a cinema in which we are always conscious of art direction, and thus of the fabricated and organised spectacle. Where does Lang trust nature or reality, save in the unavoidable seashore of *Moonfleet*, some obligatory Western landscape in the early 40s, and the uncharacteristic *Clash by Night*? That is a woman's picture more typical of producer Jerry Wald. But it has a 'documentary' section on fishing—essentially redundant—put together from footage Lang shot while waiting for filming to begin. Otherwise, Lang's exteriors are meticulous studio mock-ups, and this artifice saps all the vitality of nature.

We see this in the next sequences of *The Ministry of Fear*. The camera is high enough above a wall with a gateway to show the hedged walk along which Milland is led towards release. The icy studio illumination resembles a Delvaux night, and the box hedge is as tidy as a stage labyrinth. The initial view is exceptional, but only the necessary start for the descending crane that brings the camera to ground in front of the opening gates. Liberty is a sinking sensation, with destiny arriving to meet and harry the 'free' man: an example of the contradictory dynamic with which Lang often threatens 'simple' actions. Milland walks away with the Hitchcockian warning in his ears—'Don't get involved with the police in any way'—and past the name on the wall: LEMBRIDGE ASYLUM—in bone-white chippings, a sign and an image of clinical severity.

That opening is invented for the film. But as Milland goes to the local railway station, and has to wait for his train, he turns aside into a version of the novel's beginning: the fête where the pregnant cake is waiting to be won. The fête, too, is taking place in this eery moonlight, and it is a measure of Lang's creative incongruity that the atmosphere conceals the flagrant implausibility of a nocturnal village fête. But the lawn is fake and the sky painted, so that the English merriment draped around like bunting seems more macabre than in Greene's original. With so much of the setting artificial, the fête cannot be genuine;

it may be a fate as complete as death. Like Hitchcock, Lang looks at genteel ladies and their tremulousness becomes sinister. The fortune-teller's tent is guarded by a large sign of a hand: it says 'stop', but he is urged there by kind ladies and cannot refuse.*

In the film, Milland is amused at winning the cake and cheeky when the spies realise their error. He goes back to the station and his train, and into another action sequence invented for the film. He finds an empty compartment and Lang cuts between the open doorway, writhing with steam, and Milland inside, acutely jammed into a corner of the frame as he hears a tapping noise coming his way. A blind stick feels out his doorway and a gaunt, sepulchral-voiced 'blind' man asks, 'Is there space here for one more?' We see no one else on the train and let me ask the literal-minded question, 'How did he know which door to come to?' if only to extract the answer: that a fatal knowledge possessed him. The door had awaited the man, the sound of the stick had preceded him: melodrama is charged with destiny and the riveting precision of Lang's compositions. As with few other directors, one knows there are cables, lights and crew just out of vision, yet the most tense patterns of impossible reality within the framed cockpit.

The 'blind' man is a fraud, one of the ring sent to retrieve that ever more absurd cake. His blindness drops away when Milland is unaware, and a rat's sharp gaze darts out of the sentimentally posed glassiness. Milland shares cake with him, and the blind man crushes his slice to dust, feeling for the vital ingredient—the cake is as magical as the apple that nuclear physicist Gary Cooper uses in *Cloak and Dagger* to explain the atom bomb, and in both cases the hand refers to the human context. When Milland looks out at the air-raid that has halted the train, the blind stick stuns him and the man makes off with the cake.

The dazed Milland sprawls over the threshold of the compartment and then staggers in pursuit across an elaborate studio exterior. It is rough ground with blasted trees, marshy pools, reeds and scrub, a ruined cottage and coils of mist on the ground. From the train, we saw a back-drop like one of Paul Nash's exhausted battlefields. This sequence is not in the book, and the dread atmosphere of the setting is evidence of Lang's morbid taste. The set is large, and an unnaturally elegant tracking shot—untroubled by broken ground—leads Milland in his chase, as serene as he is agitated. In mood, space and airlessness it is a 'perfect' setting, and the stylistic completeness makes an unnerving contrast with the frenzied action, Milland's swooning victim on a fierce treadmill, and the arbitrary bomb that destroys the cottage when the blind man retreats to it, scattering him, his gun and the cake, all over the set.

We will return to the set: so costly, it had to become essential to the action. When

*Lang regularly used the hand to express human energy and action. Jacques Rivette wrote a fine article on *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* called 'La Main', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, November 1957. Rivette's first feature quoted *Metropolis* and his recent work has seen a very pleasing separation of Langian fate from the heaviest gloom of melodrama.

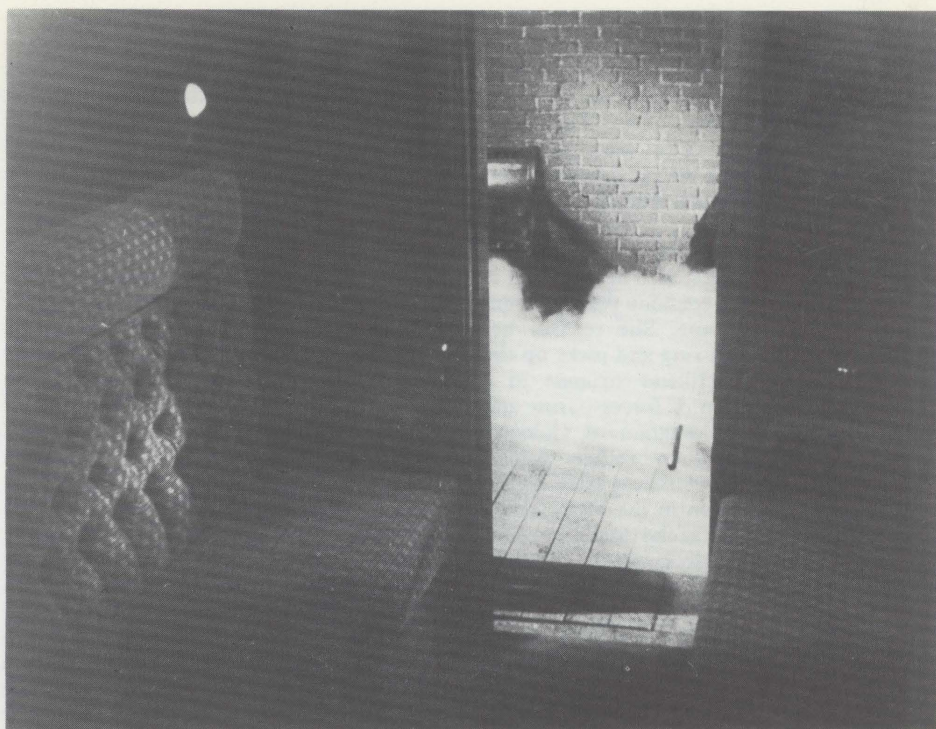
Milland has fallen in with the police, he tells his incredible story and takes them back to the shattered place to search for cake and film. This time it is daylight: a bleak, unvaried glare that does not revive the air or nature. Men in black pace about the wasteland, and when Milland goes down into the bomb crater, the scene might be a funeral or the world after a holocaust. Lang's sense of the dark future awaiting us is always apparent in the harmony of composition and melancholy settings. (*Metro-polis*, after all, is 2000.) This achievement is considerable. While Greene's novel is understandably truer to blitzed London* and the Second World War, Lang suggests the eternity of wars and the ministries that conduct them.

Action never falters in Lang; it is his language, just as his emphasis comes in acceleration. This was always apparent in his work, and no silent director made such restless films. *Dr. Mabuse, the Gambler*, from 1922, has such a teeming profusion of incident that its 3½ hours pass like an express. Time's speed is referred to throughout *The Ministry of Fear*. Milland sat motionless waiting for the clock to start his race, and in the moments before midnight he talks to the doctor about its sluggishness. The doctor remarks how often men want time to hurry, unwittingly predicting the overwhelming momentum that Milland will compare with riding the edge of a whirlpool. Better still, the film integrates the theme of time with Milland's guilty memory of his wife. The 'voice' conjured up in the séance seems to be his wife's, reliving the suspended time before she died: 'You waited for me to die. The clock stood still.' That reminds us of Milland poised to go, and the pendulum is superimposed on shots of him at the séance—flamboyant cover for a staged 'murder' that will be pinned on him, and pretext for shots of moon faces surrounded by black.

A proper account of *The Ministry of Fear*, true to Lang's dense but uncluttered invention, would require more space than I have here. The wonder is that he could compress so much into 85 minutes and make a work more lucid than the novel. He never relents from the exposition of significant action through space, shape and light: a designed image taut with irrational anxiety. If only to illustrate the order and consistency of his direction, notice the use of doorways and entrances in *The Ministry of Fear*. We have had several already: the door to Milland's room at the asylum; the outer gates; the entrance to the fortune-teller's tent; the compartment door on the train. They connect spatial areas, serve as metaphors for progress and ordeal, and comprise a visual pattern that nearly rhymes as the film progresses, so that the crazy adventure seems more than ever ordained.

There are more than 35 doorways in the film—every one built and chosen. Counting clues, of course, is less valuable than recognising the pattern. Not only is Milland for ever knocking at doors, then having to go through inner doors and check side rooms for eavesdroppers. The doorways become as prominent as the characters. When

*The film does include a persuasive re-creation of a London Underground station being used as an air-raid shelter.



On the train: 'A blind stick feels out his doorway . . .'

Milland visits Mrs. Penteel's apartment, her name is on the door in a surrealist design with an eye for the bellpush. He rings and the door is opened by Mrs. Bellane: identities are confused throughout the film. In Lang's world, home has been so undermined that anyone can be anywhere. Mrs. Bellane was the medium at the séance who relayed the false message. She is a glamorous woman—one of Lang's sinuous seductresses—and she opens the door in a hat that drops a veil over one eye, bruising on the bellpush eyeball?

Later in the film, when Milland has convinced the police, he and the Inspector visit a tailor's where the spy ring operates. The Inspector goes in ahead, to be measured for an unwanted suit, and Milland follows in a few minutes. The tailor's premises have

a mirror along one wall that disrupts our sense of space and place, reinforcing the effect of duplicity—the shop is a front, and the customers are bogus.

The tailor proves to be Dan Duryea, already familiar as the latecomer denied the cake at the fête, and the man Milland is supposed to have killed at the séance. He stares through Milland with his snake's smile, and claims not to know him. But then, in the mirror, the Inspector draws back the curtain to a fitting room and Duryea is trapped between the two figures. He does not panic, and the spatial arrangement is so clinching that for a moment Duryea becomes the victim. Knowing he is doomed, he phones a warning to Willi Hilfe. This is from the book, including the poignant line, 'Personally, sir, I have no

'Milland staggers in pursuit across an elaborate studio exterior . . .'



hope. No hope at all.' But the film has him dial the call with monstrous tailor's shears, whereas Greene employs this weapon only after the call. In the film, Duryea runs to a side office and locks himself in. The police break a hole in the glass door and the camera looks through to see Duryea with the shears in his stomach, and his reflection in another mirror.

Milland chases the phone call and finds Willi Hilfe with his sister. The Austrian is wearing the suit that contains the microfilm and is about to escape. She realises her brother heads the spy ring and picks up the gun as Willi and Milland struggle in a Langian parallelogram of forces—arms and table legs making a diagram of violence. 'You wouldn't shoot your brother, Carla?' Willi whispers in the darkness after he has put out the light. Then in the black frame, we see a surge of light as the door opens and Willi slips out. The door closes, a shot is fired, a pinpoint of light appears in the door and we hear a body falling outside. It is melodrama that muffles a sister killing her brother, but the omission by Greene's standards is part of Lang's insinuation that spatial relationships are as profound as human relations. Doors last, but human beings pass in and out.

The door stays to the bitter end. Armed spies now pursue Milland and Carla to the roof. As ever, it is night. A gun battle follows with flashes illuminating the en-

trance to the roof. Then a light comes on below, the spies look down in alarm, are shot and replaced by the slowly ascending and still ominous Inspector—apparently an ally, but like inspectors in *M* or Gruber in *Hangmen Also Die*. The law is blemished in much of Lang's work, anticipating the shocking betrayal of trust that occurs with Dana Andrews in *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*.

I have quoted Greene's ending already. Lang's is distressing too, but in another way. The shot of the Inspector turns into a daft idyll by back projection: a sea-shore and a sunny sky with Milland and Carla in the shell of a sports car. 'I've always dreamed of a church wedding,' she says, at one with the stupid bliss of high key. 'We'll have flowers, a cake . . .' And a suddenly bland Milland guffaws in mock alarm 'A cake!' as the film rushes out on a surge of cheerful music. It is a derisory happy ending, thrust at us with the speed of a salesman who mistrusts his goods.

The happy ending is so often a rotten fruit in Lang's work. *Metropolis* remains a transfixing vision of privilege and the masses destroying the world through their intractable opposition, in no way redeemed by the sentimental vacuity that brings artisan and aristocrat together: 'There can be no understanding between the hands and the brain unless the heart acts as mediator.' It is a forlorn solution because of the heartlessness in Lang's style, and not too far from the humbug confidence the fascists used to overlay their brutal, cleansing solutions. After the enactment of malevolent genius, decadent rulers and resentful masses, the inevitability of physical disaster seems manifest. (Mabuse wants power only to destroy the world.) The conclusion is either feeble abdication or futile irony. Lang's message is more powerful than commercial codas, and it resists the habitual good cheer with which audiences were expected to quit the dark. The awesomeness of his films rests in the fatal guarantee of tragedy and the predictable end in darkness.

I think it was a power greater than Lang understood. The conscious man conscientiously disliked and abandoned the Nazis, but the implications of his films are of a world fit for tyrants. When destiny so oppresses mankind, the implacable leader comes to power by virtue of stylistic conviction. That, surely, is what Hitler felt wherever he saw *Metropolis*. Lang's pessimism is terrible, organic and glamorous—what makes it so terrible is the expressive certainty, the overwhelming of human nature and the aggrandisement of fate. It is a vision to inspire and thrill wishful tyrants, and Mabuse is a deeply equivocal mastermind. Though fearsome and ugly, he is omniscient and magical, and lack of doubt in the cinema is immensely attractive, especially when portrayed through melodrama.

Lang escaped Germany, but kept his style intact. *Fury*, his first American film, has a studio ending in which Spencer Tracy's vengeance subsides. But people sigh and smile at it now. The imprint of discredited justice and of the decent man being made malignant is not easily erased. Tracy's retreat to a bare room from which he plans his vendetta is visually very close to Mabuse's hostility towards the world.

In 1948, Lang wrote an article, 'Happily Ever After' (*Penguin Film Review*, No. 5), in which he attempted to reject the 'pre-arranged fate' of his early films in favour of human character. But I cannot detect any such change in the films. He is one of the most important and effective of directors, and the effect is the fatalness of melodramatic certainty.

All his life, I think, Lang was misunderstood or treated too lightly. So long-lived, he could not be avoided in film histories, or denied the stature that we give to heroic survival. His German period was more 'respectable' for many people. It was filled with classics; and Lang was safer than, say, Leni Riefenstahl, because of his decision to leave Germany. Yet the sureness in their films is very similar. Lang had no equal at studio film-making, and he showed how stifling a form that could be. His brilliance was so cold that it was hard to touch, let alone analyse.

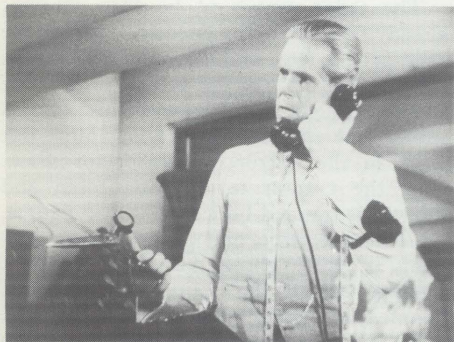
I have tried to lay hands on one text, and assess its meaning. I do not question Lang's own liberalism. But I do believe he made authoritarian films, so expressive that we should beware of the cinema. The earlier books on Lang are not very instructive. In France, adulation has confused his clarity, and both Franju and Luc Moullet obscured his succinct pessimism. The Bogdanovich interview is too relaxed, and Paul Jensen's book was scorned by Lang for inaccuracies.

Now comes Lotte Eisner's major study, looked forward to for at least ten years. It is by far the most thorough account of his career. The author knew Lang well enough to quote from personal letters. She is an unquestioned expert on German cinema, she is familiar with French writings on Lang and she had the advantage of his scripts to consult. But too much of the time she merely recounts plots and seldom works outwards from the cinematic impact. The stills are not often referred to in the text and they are publicity pictures as opposed to crucial frames. Lang needs the visual analysis Truffaut used to celebrate Hitchcock, and he needs an admirer who can admit the chance of a great director making fearful films. Lotte Eisner is effectively on the balcony in *Le Mépris*, as witness her endorsement of this letter from Lang, even if it refers to that most confounding film, *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*:

'I no longer believe in mystical fate. Every human being makes his own fate by the way in which he uses his experience (or does not use his experience), by the choice or rejection of events and situations he partakes in, by what he manages to achieve or not to achieve, for whatever reasons. No mystical fate, no God or whatever, is responsible for his fate *except himself*. And this is why one cannot get away from what one has created for oneself.'

Part of the Lang legend is that in *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* he put Nazi slogans in criminal speeches. I fear that the above is a liberal sentiment coming from a severe pessimist, a hope not fulfilled on the screen. It is a signal, once again, to trust the films and not the director. ■

All stills taken from the frame by the National Film Archive and the Educational Advisory Service of the B.F.I.



Above: 'Personally, sir, I have no hope . . .'
Below: the tailor's suicide, as seen through the broken glass



**He disappeared in the dead of winter
What instruments we have agree . . .
The day of his death was a dark cold
day**

I was in Rome when I heard that Henri Langlois had died on 12 January. There was no snow on the statues, but there had been an incredible hail storm that day, the day the *provinces of his body revolted*. It was sudden, in one sense: he had been saying of late that he knew he was not going to live much longer, but we all thought him indestructible.

I first met Henri Langlois nearly twenty years ago, when SIGHT AND SOUND, having commissioned a pamphlet on Max Ophüls for its short-lived second Index Series, bundled me off to Paris where the Cinémathèque was going to show me Ophüls' French films of the 30s. All this had been arranged with Mary Meerson, Langlois' companion (as the French always put it) since the war, and the *éminence grise* of the Cinémathèque. But the meeting with Langlois was, typically, explosive. The very fact that I had been sent by the BFI seemed to him (or at least so he pretended) to prove that I must be mixed up with some now long forgotten dispute between the two organisations about a print of *L'Age d'Or* that had somehow found its way to Tel-Aviv. My protests of innocence, indeed of total ignorance, went unheeded; he ranted on, until Mary Meerson came in to tell him to stop it. Then the two of them began to fight with each other. I didn't know what to do, so I just stood my ground and waited for them to finish. Suddenly, he stopped, turned round, looked at me, and grinned. He had apparently decided that I had passed the test—whatever that may have been.

From that day on, all (well, almost all) was sunny, and we became friends—although he always called me Roud. Always, that is, until the last time I saw him, a week before his death, when he suddenly started calling me Richard. Looking back, it seems significant; maybe not.

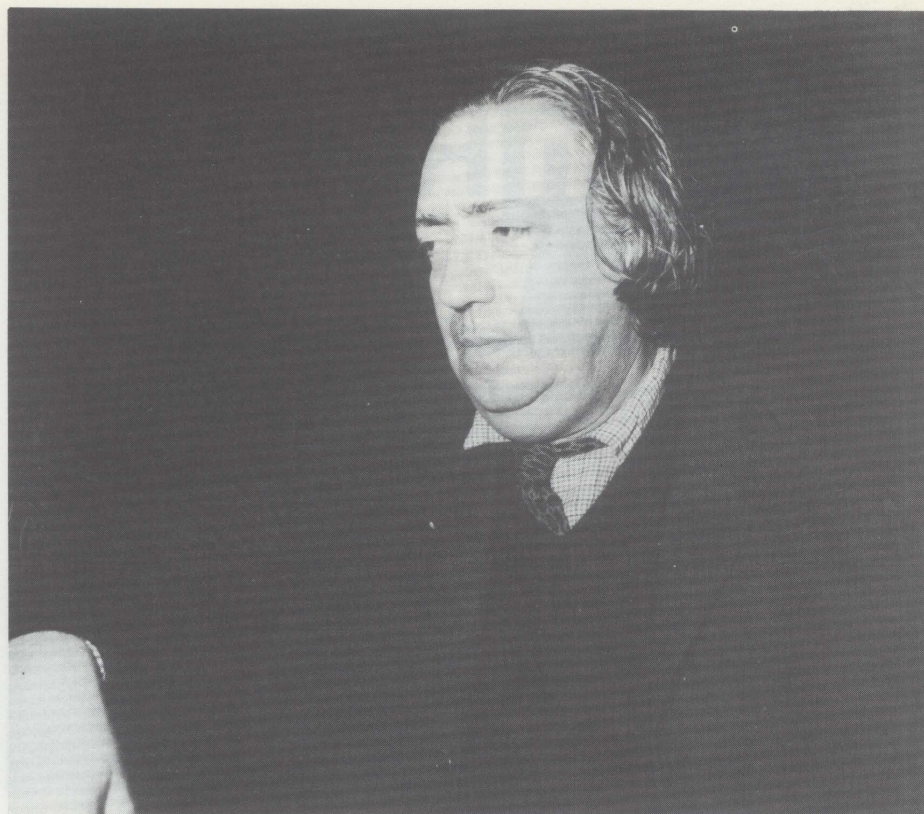
**You were silly like us; your gift
survived it all . . .**

Langlois was a difficult man sometimes, but he was a good man and a great one. And with any luck, his gift, his creation—the Cinémathèque Française—will survive. At the first meeting after his death of the Steering Committee of the General Assembly, Mary Meerson was confirmed as General Administrator, and we can trust her to carry on in Langlois' spirit. Indeed, even during his lifetime, she was responsible for many uncredited (*her choice*) achievements—like the Chaillot theatre.

The collection has survived too, in spite of all the tales of rusty cans. They *were* rusty, but in all the years that I borrowed films from the Cinémathèque for the National Film Theatre and later for the New York Film Festival, I always found that beautiful prints came out of those admittedly rusty cans.

He became his admirers . . .

But even if the collection had turned to dust—as his enemies have always predicted—his memorial would be a living one, the school of French directors which used to be known as the New Wave and who



PHOTOGRAPH: NICOLETTA ZALAFFI

Henri Langlois

always proclaimed that the Cinémathèque was where they had learned most about the art of film-making.

Of course, the conditions of screening were not impeccable; the films were often not subtitled, or if so, in Serbo-Croat. And often the film announced was not the film shown. Sometimes a reel was missing: when someone complained about this to Mary Meerson, her ready response was, 'Darling, when you go to the Louvre, you don't complain because the Venus de Milo has no arms.'

**Now he is scattered among a hundred
cities**

**And wholly given over to unfamiliar
affections . . .**

Even before his death, Langlois' activities circled the globe. The French are often accused of being chauvinistic (and Chauvin himself was a Frenchman), but if ever there was an internationalist, it was Langlois. He sometimes attributed this to his birth in Smyrna (where his father was a station-master for the French-run Turkish railways). And there was that American grandmother he used to brag about. But the fact was that he had a world view of the cinema, and therefore he was interested in the world (or was it the other way round?). He was particularly fond of London, and nourished great affection for what he called the Old Guard of the BFI. Some of them are now dead, like Olwen Vaughan and Norah Traylen; some long gone from the BFI, like Denis Forman and James Quinn; one is still around: the editor of SIGHT AND SOUND.

**Follow, poet, follow right/To the
bottom of the night,
With your unconstraining voice/
Still persuade us to rejoice . . .**

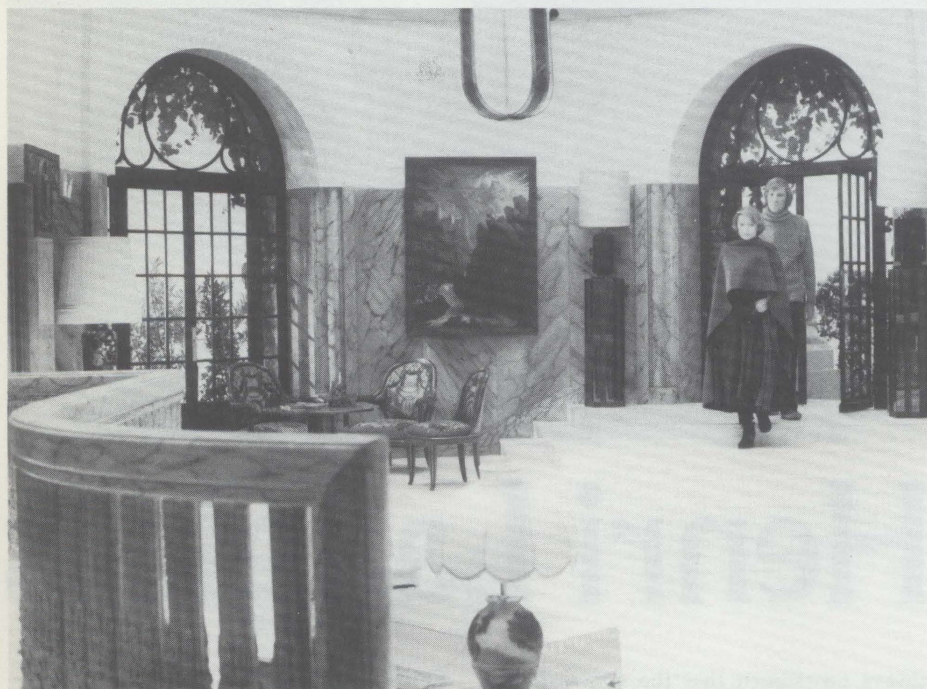
And these words of W. H. Auden about Yeats, like the others I have quoted, apply to Langlois: he loved the cinema and wanted others to rejoice in its glories. And that love was all-embracing. Unlike some archivists, he didn't tickle his ego by picking and choosing the films he was going to preserve. Not for him the selection committee. He had his own ideas, but he was wise enough to know that his taste was conditioned by his date of birth, his upbringing and all manner of things, and that the true archivist has to allow for this. He was very fond of the late Iris Barry of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, but he disapproved strongly of her decision many years ago that as there were only four 'great' films of Buster Keaton, those four were all she took, although the Museum had been offered them all. He just didn't understand how she, or anyone, could be *sure*. So often films which were considered unimportant by their contemporaries (Feuillade is the great example) turned out to be greatly appreciated by later generations.

Earth receive an honoured guest . . .

Henri Langlois is laid to rest; his achievements, his personality, his wit and intelligence will not, I think, be forgotten—at least not by me, or by any of those who knew and, therefore, loved him.

RICHARD ROUD

Film Reviews



'Providence': Ellen Burstyn, David Warner

Providence

Night. A country house somewhere in England. Fern, ivy, crumbling stone. Half concealed by ivy, a plaque on the wall of the house with, in convoluted lettering, its name: Providence. Inside, a writer, old, wracked with bowel disorders, struggles to fuse images of memory and imagination into a coherent, providential fiction, much as an insomniac, restlessly turning channels on his television set, begins to see them all—Western, commercial break, situation comedy—as elements of some larger, protean narrative. Other houses in England or New England, Massachusetts or Providence, Rhode Island, houses, the writer thinks, in which something might occur, with which something might be done . . . A bedroom through which a footballer jogs unconcernedly, a football stadium where football is never played. A villa at Cap Ferrat overlooking a painted backdrop of the sea (like the painted shadows on the gravel paths of Marienbad), but from which real waves break on to the beach.

Alain Resnais is, in every sense, a precious artist, and much of his 'work' (*Tintin*, *Mandrake*, *The Adventures of Harry Dickson*—a project so invested with reality that were it actually to turn up, a legendary 'lost film' in some dusty archive, one would not be too astonished—and *The Inmates*, with American cartoonist Stan Lee) belongs in a rare phantom filmography. From the first tracking shots around the writer's estate with its Selznickian plaque to his son's drive through the now American, now English city, past facades of houses that might be haunted by Lovecraft (on whose life Resnais had hoped to make a documentary and be, perhaps, the Baudelaire of that second-rate Poe) and, ghost of a ghost, Harry Dickson, what

is fascinating about *Providence* is that it accords him an unexpected chance to exploit his most personal mythology: one fashioned out of (a rough sample) Lautréamont, Roussel, Jules Verne, Breton's *Nadja*, Cocteau, the *populofantastique* of Gaston Leroux and *Fantômas*, photography, comic strips and *zôs avant-garde*. When Feuillade, the artisan, the Douanier Rousseau of surrealist cinema, discovered his vocation in urban poetry, he at once reconciled Lumière and Méliès. In *Providence* Feuillade in turn is reconciled with L'Herbier, the aesthete who despised him and whose mastery of form might be compared to Resnais' own.

Though he himself would repudiate the term, and though on the credit titles his own name never appears before the modest '*mise en scène de . . .*' at the end, Resnais is indeed an auteur; an obsessional artist, less in terms of outworn thematic consistencies of time and memory than plastically, in his sense of and infallible eye for architecture as a receptacle of mystery, and its deployment in an almost 'serial' conception of montage. That eye, as witness the volume of photographs *Répérages*, is drawn above all to the very origins of modernity, to the past's notions of the future (which, in Verne, constitutes for us the real *fantastique*), to that curious transitional period, half nineteenth, half twentieth century, half *fin*, half *début de siècle*, which the Eiffel Tower appropriately bestrides, and which in the cinema is most eloquently commemorated by overhead railways, lifts and other nostalgic accessories of the industrial revolution.

But it is true (and truer still of another 'visionary', Franju) that scenes which respond less to such visual preoccupations—straight dialogue or interior scenes—are occasionally shot and lit (though never edited) with a disconcerting flatness. It can be argued that,

between them, Resnais and Franju made most of the best short films in the world, that somewhat thankless medium being ideally suited to their essayist, image-making gifts. Confronted with feature length, however, and the demands of extended fictions, Resnais in particular has depended rather heavily on his collaborators. Which means that his and Robbe-Grillet's radical dislocation of space-time continuity in *Marienbad* has been reduced in *Providence*, for the purposes of David Mercer's dramaturgy, whose sole register is the grinding out of immediate significance, to a suave legerdemain with layers of representation in which the least attentive spectator will soon find his bearings. Everything here meets the eye. Nothing is left unstated. No line of dialogue (and what dialogue!) ever finds its echo in another. There is a degree of soul-baring unheard of outside one of the more minor plays of the English school or of Albee, though cunningly set in relief by Resnais' use of backdrops and the sort of theatrical positioning that suggests chalk lines on a studio floor. If we are none the less moved by the dying of Clive Langham,* by the 'rushes' of his novel, for which he enlists members of his family, magnifying, parodying, distorting their relationships and sometimes losing control of them like a puppeteer painfully snarled in the strings of his puppets, it is not simply that Resnais has found within his own mythology some haunting visual correspondences for his hero's figments but also that these acquire en route such narrative conviction, almost divorced from the framing device of a writer's consciousness, as to render no less unreal than they the final sequence: the morning after the white night and Langham's tranquil birthday lunch with his sons and daughter-in-law.

In Langham's book, his son Claud (Dirk Bogarde) has prosecuted a young man, Kevin (David Warner), for the mercy-killing of an old hermit hunted by soldiers, and allegedly metamorphosing into a wolf-like animal. The trial, at which Claud's wife Sonia (Ellen Burstyn) is present, leads to a strange series of events: how Sonia pursues Kevin in an act of vengeful disaffection from her husband; how throughout Kevin remains as indifferent to Sonia's advances as to Claud's baiting of him; how Claud's mistress Helen (Elaine Stritch), dying of cancer, is intermittently confused with Langham's real wife Molly, who committed suicide. And how finally Claud hunts down and shoots Kevin, himself now a werewolf, in the forest where the old hermit was killed. Interspersed with these events are other, brief images of earthquake tremors, bombings, fires, accidents, police and ambulance sirens, which are, of course, metaphors for the old writer's physical suffering and fear of death. So, too, is the stadium where the victims of an undefined *coup* are herded together, interrogated, perhaps even tortured, but which becomes, in Langham's drunken state, a place of execution of the old and ailing.

So far, so-so. But what emphatically saves *Providence* from being the middlebrow (or upper-middlebrow) fable such a digest must make it appear is the way it permits of a vein of fantasy and the marvellous rare in Resnais' work, as I have said, outside the 'parallel' filmography, his familiar editing style being a no less admirable vehicle for the writer's mental processes. Claud, for instance, a fearful prig in the novel, his whole affective life long since sacrificed on the altar of self-control, lives in a pompous mansion that is a masterpiece of funereal chic and of the decorator's art, and exactly to the taste of Lady Beltham in *Fantômas*. The city, or collage of cities, comprising elements of present and past and not to be identi-

*Gielgud's face, together with the character's bile, his egotism, his cultured Englishman's fondness for Chablis—a lot of white wine is drunk in this film—and the Riviera, is the Sutherland portrait of Maugham come to life.

fied as a particular place in time, is a suitably 'eldritch' amalgam of Lovecraft's Arkham, the settings of Henry James' ghost stories and even the magically transmuted Philadelphia and Pittsburg where Jules Verne based his Scientific Societies. The werewolves, another of which we see mournfully doubled up and bundled into an ambulance, call 30s and 40s horror movies to mind; the stylised (and very beautiful) backdrops Anglo-American theatre of the same period. Indeed, there is a fairy-tale feel to the film not unlike that of the bizarre monument in the Parc Monceau that so obsessed Stavisky.

But such already seductive textures are considerably enriched by other anti-naturalistic devices. Such as the numerous gaffes in continuity, as the counters of Langham's fiction are imposed upon by its plotting: Kevin's erection is the most diverting example of this, when in fact, as he ungallantly explains to Sonia, 'It isn't mine!' Or, as if to weigh the validity of a scene, one character's *repliques*, and on occasion his voice, are lent another. It is notable, too, in the light of Resnais' claim to being an instinctive rather than a cerebral director, that what would seem to have been central to the original idea as announced continues to hover on the edges of the completed film and, *a fortiori*, the novel within it: the clownish footballer forever straying offside, as it were, through bedrooms and on to verandas, and the rather facile atmospherics of the stadium.

In the last sequence Langham, discovered by his valet drunk and passed out on the bathroom floor, has been shaved, dressed, sat in a deck-chair on the lawn and made ready to receive. The family arrive: Claud and Sonia, then Kevin who, it transpires, is his illegitimate son and an astrophysicist in Geneva. Lunch is served. We overhear scraps of the talk at table. We sense, too, in the old man's concluding words the remains of a certain *bonheur de vivre*, as one says: the remains of a meal. And, as the camera tracks gently away from the house in a 360-degree crane over the English countryside's almost pre-Raphaelite greenness, why do we feel that, his pains at an end or the Chablis given out, *he has died in the night*? It is not just that this sequence comes too late and occupies too little running time in the context of the whole film, but that there is about it an airy unreality, contrasting with but hardly less unreal than the aquarium lighting in which the rest is bathed. That Claud, for instance, is now more human and vulnerable, drawn to his father by much more solid bonds of affection than the overbearing creature of the novel, is not offered as a revelation of truth but as yet another hypothesis, if not for the novel itself, then for the film *Providence*.

Doubt, modesty or a kind of censorship (or, more likely, the commercial pressures brought to bear on him) have prompted Resnais since *Marienbad* and *Muriel* to move away from the notion of chronology as dictated by specifically cinematic parameters, and in no way imitative of 'real time', towards a more cautiously fragmented structure, in which time is 'real' or generated by 'real' phenomena: the mental images of a central consciousness, an interiority, an 'I' (or, in the case of *Je t'aime, je t'aime*, a time machine!). Yet there was nothing arbitrary about the multiple options of *Marienbad*; on the contrary, to motivate a formal *parti pris* along psychological or science-fiction lines is, in a sense, arbitrary. The virtue of *Providence* is to call that 'I' constantly into question without at the same time denying the resonant richness of its perceptions.

The dream cast perform together superbly, each voice contributing its particular sonority to the ensemble: Resnais has spoken of a quintet in which Bogarde would be piano, Ellen Burstyn violin, Gielgud cello, Warner viola and Elaine Stritch bass. Miklos Rosza's score is perfect.

GILBERT ADAIR

The Middle Man

Over the years, there has been a delicate but perceptible shift in Satyajit Ray's attitudes to his subjects. The characteristic Ray protagonist remains a young man, educated to higher expectations and gentler and more idealistic standards than modern India can accommodate, affronting his destiny—usually some variation on the decay of hope. But Ray, unlike so many western directors, never seems to be trying to rediscover his own youth in sentimental identification. The sense of distance, a certain detachment in the storyteller's relation to his subject, is one of the keys to the refinement of his narrative style; and if Apu could be seen as, let's say, the director's younger brother, a more mature Ray now takes an almost paternal attitude to young Somnath Bannerji (Pradib Mukherjee), anti-hero of *The Middle Man* (Connoisseur).

Somnath, as it happens, arouses fatherly feelings in almost everyone: puppyish, optimistic, inexperienced and unhappy, he is seen at the outset as a victim of the sheer size of India, of the tangles of its baffled bureaucracy and the unmanageable chaos of its economy. The bright student only gets a pass degree—the man marking the exams, a harried, overworked pen-pusher, can't that evening borrow his neighbour's spectacles and takes out his frustration on Somnath's paper. There's no point in trying to challenge the academic verdict: Somnath must make the best of it, which in practice means typing endless job applications (or failing to type them: 'Dear Sir?' he manages laboriously, before going destructively to work with an indiarubber). Ten job vacancies produce *one million* applications; and whether this is an actual statistic or a justifiable exaggeration, it conveys the scale of the problem even more forcefully than the crowded job interviews of *The Adversary*.

Here Ray disposes of similar interviews, with their astonishing irrelevancies ('Tell me, what is the weight of the moon?') by way of some brisk, old-fashioned montage. Then Somnath slips, literally, on a banana skin, and into an encounter with an old friend who can actually offer him a job—a corner of an office, the use of a telephone, some pretentiously inapposite letterheads, and the precarious status of middle man between buyer and seller. Sometimes through montage, more often via brief vignettes of life in the dilapidated Dickensian office, Ray assembles a great deal of sheer narrative information. In a famous essay, Mary McCarthy commented on the tribulations for the novelist,

now that readers no longer look to fiction for information about the running of a printing works or the structure of the whaling industry. Ray's delightful 19th century thoroughness leaves one fascinated by the detail of what Somnath actually does, by the rickety office community, the wiles and stratagems of 'order/supply', the proud consummation of trifling deals in duplicating paper.

Somnath's father is a rather staid and lugubrious old man, who is liable to be shocked and upset by almost any discovery he might make about the world he lives in. For practical help, Somnath finds substitute fathers in the assortment of book-keepers, brokers and publicity men clinging by their fingernails to their own shabby corner of a corrupt economy. They may live on the small change of commercial bribery, but they are very kindly to the novice, who fairly quickly finds himself on the edge of the big make or break deal. That this deal involves engaging a call girl for the man who can make the contract is broken to Somnath by the PR man, played by Robi Ghosh with wonderful, matter-of-fact energy and the glittering eye of a fanatical hustler. After some moderately ludicrous failures to collect and deliver the merchandise, the girl eventually procured turns out to be the sister of Somnath's old college friend; and the screw of moral decision is tightened towards betrayal.

The dilemma of the boy from the Brahmin family fallen on hard times is essentially personal: he simply hadn't thought he was the kind of man who did things like this. It is left to the girl, already more of a realist about the world of supply and demand, to go ahead with the assignment she's been hired for, while Somnath is shilly-shallying with his conscience. Somnath is blooded in the career he would never have chosen; the puppy has joined the pack. And another small defeat—in the context of the film's scheme of things, it is essential that it should be a defeat in a minor key—is chalked on the scoreboard.

The Middle Man is urbane, genial, so observantly funny in its detail and so sympathetically engaged with all its characters that the fundamental pessimism of its attitudes becomes the more melancholy and impressive. Ray never raises his voice in a tirade. He shows, through the swift devices of ironic comedy, a society which accepts corruption because it sees no other way, in which the old can only sit out their retirement, mourning the past and protected by their children against the present, while the young have the choice of hooliganism, revolution or of finding their own precarious

'The Middle Man': Bimal Chatterjee, Robi Ghosh, Pradib Mukherjee



route into a system fuelled by waste and inefficiency, the middle man providing his clients only with what they are getting already from other sources and by other means.

Ray, of course, develops the pessimism through the people, the assortment of individualists (few of his films have offered so wide a range of quick, exact characterisation) betrayed by the human comedy. At the outset, Somnath is let down by a girl who settles for a marriage arranged by her family. She borrows his handkerchief to sniffle into, rather as though she feels such a gesture is expected of her, and when she hands it back the puppy-hero shows some teeth: 'Keep it; you might want to cry again on the bus going home.' At the end of the sequence, out of the dark, comes that most characteristic sound of a Ray film: a train in the night. But this is a film in which there is nowhere to go; as the Indian paper *The Statesman* pointed out in its review, they are all 'partners in the total corruption of the social order.' That everyone involved is also a victim, though not necessarily an innocent one, is the pre-condition of Ray's essential, unfashionable humanism. The woman who has sold her daughters into prostitution is bright and brisk and houseproud; the business man drives a sorry little car whose glove compartment flies open at every bump in the road; the underside of the system is rather kindlier, and certainly less pompous, than its official face.

There is a debilitating critical notion that humanist cinema is dominated by content—that it is somehow creatively a soft way out. Anyone who thinks this should look closely at *The Middle Man*, at the way the film uses its settings to extend the field of its action, at the sheer narrative adroitness of its transitions, at the control of nuance which suggests that all choices are moral, but that in present-day India they are all too often predetermined. Ray's is not the cinema of the soft option.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

Network

In America, *Network* (United Artists) begins with what you left at home: the hubbub of evening news programmes, and four coloured screens buzzing in the dark frame. Three are of existing networks and anchor-men—NBC, CBS, ABC—and the fourth is UBS with its front-man Howard Beale (Peter Finch), a

veteran losing out in the ratings struggle. Beale goes on a drunk with the man who has to fire him, Max Schumacher (William Holden), and in their cups they conjure with the facetious horror of a series devoted to suicide, rape, hold-ups, every daily outrage—*The Death Hour*. Next day, Beale admits on the air that he has been fired and mentions that he will kill himself in a week's time on live TV. The press gabbles, the lines are jammed, UBS goes into shock. But the dying programme picks up millions of viewers. On the next night, Beale grants that his outburst was madness; he was just fed up with the 'bullshit'—aren't we all, he asks sadly.

With two offences in a row, Beale might have vanished from public view and the news been restored to calm and propriety. But UBS is an ailing network with two rabid self-seekers: Frank Hackett (Robert Duvall), a stomping executive, and Diana Christensen (Faye Dunaway), huntress of screen sensation in Programming. She takes over the news and uses the demented Beale as a 'latterday prophet' raging against hard times and urging the people towards God, gurus and UBS in a stew of game show and sham evangelism.

The show soars in the ratings and carries UBS, Hackett and Christensen to glory, until one day the unmanageable Beale chooses to attack the secretive conglomerate behind UBS. His preaching buries the White House in protests against a takeover by Arabs, and Beale is called before Jensen, the man relying on that deal. He is another mad prophet who converts Beale to the gospel of human insignificance in the face of corporations and currencies conspiring towards an age of total, satisfied consumption, 'every anxiety tranquillised, all boredom amused'. Beale's new message has neither thrill nor comfort and his programme slumps. Hackett and Christensen are helpless. They cannot fire Beale because he is Jensen's Son at 6.30, so they kill him—on live TV—through the agency of the Ecumenical Liberation Army, who have been collaborating on another of Diana's new programmes, *The Mao Tse-tung Hour*, in which documentary footage of terrorist outrages leads in to a drama series about the everyday life of a group of militant radicals. The film ends with four screens again: action replays of Beale's shooting jostling with commercials for soft drinks and the selling line, 'Why compromise?'

Network is a furious and infuriating tangle. Is it a brilliant/shocking/corrosive satire on America's dwelling in screened imitations of

reality, or is it a snake devouring its own tail? Is the satire cleansing or only huckster railery, responsible anger turned into self-contempt by the cynicism that ravishes every ideal? It is a reckless but literate film, incoherent and pre-tentious, piercing yet evasive. It is itself very like TV, the monster it mocks. Sidney Lumet's direction is in shelter, but *Network* is thunderously written and as contentious as Paddy Chayefsky's last picture, *The Hospital*. Every time I saw the film in America, audiences identified with its haphazard spleen and applauded at the end. Was that simply a version of the inane rabble-rousing of Beale asking his audience to get up from the set, go to the window and cry out 'I'm as mad as hell, and I'm not going to take it any more'? Or was it a true lament for a culture distraught at its own reliance on TV? Is horror nullified by the assent of 'Right on', and is there nothing to do but bear witness to our contorted integrity?

The film is best when least sequential—bursts of impact not pondered or related. There is a feeling all through that it is preparing for a leap into comic-book caricature. Perhaps it needed William Burroughs to write the script, if only to catch the devastating interruptedness of TV. The movie needs commercials, preferably for itself. Isolated scenes are very funny—the terrorists haggling with network lawyers over subsidiary rights—or beautifully lunatic, as when Jensen bulges with his corporation gospel. But restraining this frenzied crescendo is the dull realism of the UBS offices and studios and the use of the William Holden character as a sour observer of the dementia. In *The Hospital*, the George C. Scott doctor was the more engaging because he struggled to contain both Max and Beale, sceptic and believer, rueful spectator of chaos and damaged participant in it. But in *Network*, Max is from the early days of TV: he sentimentalises over Ed Murrow and might have known the Chayefsky who wrote *Marty* and those other pieces of sentimental 'realism'. He comes from that soft source and offers the sketchy outline of decency and humanity; his reality subsides under windy humanist speeches and the thorough implausibility of his falling for Diana. When he is fired by Hackett, he warns that he will expose UBS irresponsibility—nothing follows, except a slowly accumulating pile of manuscript for the book he plays with writing. When he leaves his wife for Diana she predicts great grief for him. But he suffers only the stuffed unhappiness of soap opera—with a little more panache, their affair might have been as wild a parody of daytime TV as *Mary Hartman*. As it is, it looks like padding and a narrative framework for audiences who might have been disconcerted by more fragmentation.

Max becomes a grumbling old woman who allows himself to be the recipient of Diana's nearly instant orgasm, followed by a brief collapse—commercial break?—before she resumes the frantic love talk wheedling for advice on programme problems. Diana is the only intriguing person in the film, despite the heavy-handed attempt to present her as the spirit of TV. She is akin to the medium: shimmering and hectic, all instant appeal and fended off boredom, without substance, feelings or ideas. She fidgets and blurs like a TV picture and horizontal hold probably worries her more than grasp on reality. It is a cunning use of Faye Dunaway's frigid, nervy glamour and an accomplished performance.

The other characters are merely dumped on the film. Max's 'responsibility' is a lazy pose; Robert Duvall comes as close to plainness as he is capable with a stereotype who is only foul-mouthed bluster and stupid ruthlessness. Emptiest of all is Beale. The film blithely consigns him to madness and never tells us anything about the man: perhaps he only exists when he is on the air. We laugh at his grotesque messianism and reflect wistfully on



'Network': Jensen (Ned Beatty) 'bulges with his corporation gospel'

his complaints. He may be right, but his rhetoric ignores the chance of action. Thus he collapses after every jeremiad—fainting fits or feigned fits? We never know, but the dramatic fall signals applause, relief and escaped responsibility.

Chayefsky is surely caught in the same dilemma. The film bristles with articulate curses against TV. It is an onslaught on trite sensation corrupting consequences. But its methods and devices are those of TV: the moving image; abrupt transitions; cheap laughs; hollow characters; activity concealing no point of view; movement as a distraction from meaning. The film is as vicious and feeble as a wasp trapped in the jam it craves, and if *Network* is essential viewing it is because of this chronic confusion. It is a satire without detachment, roots or hope of remedy. The whole film bellows with the cry Beale sells to viewers, but there is no pain, only the bitter-sweet irony of the Orson Welles scorpion that killed its carrier frog. Chayefsky knows we are drowning without dying in TV, but he concedes that 'Help!' is only a gesture in a Lichtenstein painting of a comic-book crisis.

DAVID THOMSON



'The Story of Adèle H.': Isabelle Adjani

The Story of Adèle H.

Immediately after the credits at the beginning of the film stands the legend: THIS STORY IS TRUE. *The Story of Adèle H.* (Hemdale) is not only a story—it is history too. History stranger than fiction. It tells the tale of Victor Hugo's second daughter, sister of the tragically drowned Léopoldine, who pursues a young English lieutenant to Halifax in Nova Scotia where she attempts in every way at her command to win back his love, is rejected persistently until she loses her reason, but still pursues him to Barbados, whence she is shipped home to Guernsey where her father lives. We learn in a stunning documentary epilogue that this daughter 'of the most famous man in the world' lived on for forty years and died in obscurity in 1915.

It is the portrait of an obsessive more familiar to us in the form of written fiction than in films. Books like *Manon Lescaut* or Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris* come to mind; both these great works have an edge of refinement, some sort of distancing from the 'reality' they record which prevents them falling into hysteria, self-pity or special pleading. Truffaut shows exceptional courage in attempting to observe Adèle's history with detachment, a detachment more awkward, claustrophobic and clinical than that which he brought to his only other film based on fact: the story of Doctor Itard and *L'Enfant Sauvage*. In the earlier film the device of using Itard's journal, in which he recorded the transformations which took place in the boy's behaviour as he was led into the world of human society, spoke eloquently of a profound optimism which encouraged the scientist to persevere against all odds.

Adèle H. is surely Truffaut's most pessimistic and depressive film. There is none of his familiar tenderness; no celebration of the delighting oddness of human conduct which marks even his other 'dark' films like *La Sirène du Mississippi* or *La Mariée était en Noir*. We are presented with a case, neither our compassion nor a sense of outrage is solicited. There is no humour in the story—just as in life there are few laughs when we find (or put) ourselves in a state of obsession. What we watch in this film is the total disintegration of a human being devoured by a neurotic attachment.

Truffaut has supplied a brief essay on the film, part of which takes the curious form of a numbered list of 'factors' which appealed to him in the subject:

1. Her story is the autopsy of a passion.
2. The girl is alone throughout the whole story.

3. She is the daughter of the most famous man in the world.
4. The man is referred to, but never seen.
5. Adèle assumes a number of false identities.
6. Obsessed by her *idée fixe*, she pursues an unattainable goal.
7. Every word she utters and every move she makes is related to her fixation.
8. Though she fights a losing battle, Adèle is continually active and inventive.

He also writes: 'Having filmed love stories between two and three protagonists (*Jules et Jim*), I felt it would be a fascinating challenge to concentrate on a single character.'

In fact the isolation of Adèle is purely metaphoric. There are the normal concomitant of other characters, playing landlady, bookseller, cab driver. The young lieutenant Pinson also figures largely—indeed he has scenes where Adèle is never present. But if the level of performance is any standard to go by, Truffaut is certainly not interested in anyone but Adèle. There is a puzzling woodenness about everyone in both the English and French versions of the film. As in *Fahrenheit 451* and *Les Deux Anglaises et le Continent*, Truffaut displays an unexpected insensitivity as to how lines should be spoken in any language but his native French. The result in *Adèle H.* is seriously damaging to the completed film. Are we to see in these awkward, under-directed characters some metaphor for Adèle's alienation? Is she surrounded deliberately by dummies—or bad actors?

The first two-thirds of the film is exposition. We see Adèle go about the business of winning back her lover in the 'active and inventive' way which interests Truffaut. We hear her letters home to her family asking for money and approval; we hear her distraught and increasingly craven letters to Pinson; we watch her buying paper, planning, accosting, scheming, writing and dreaming. Only in the matter of a recurring dream does the director allow himself a cinematic gesture—and one of considerable power. Adèle dreams of the drowning of her sister. A girl in a white shift rises and billowingly descends in sepia-coloured water while Maurice Jaubert's music traces an alarming percussive tune, not unlike the main theme in *Jaws*. These brief scenes have the rhythm of a slow heartbeat and the pace of stifled breathlessness. For the rest, the film follows a strict, even solemn narrative line which looks as if it is keeping scrupulously, but not always interestingly, to the facts. We feel cheated of

emotion in the big scene when Adèle invades an officers' ball dressed as a boy to plead with Pinson—we want to identify with her more. As it is we are not even embarrassed for her. She's at the other end of a telescope—or under a microscope.

This clinical approach gathers rewards in other contexts. The audience would hardly tolerate a heroine who lies with such ferocious calmness to everyone, but Truffaut and Isabelle Adjani, who plays Adèle, contrive to increase our interest in her the madder she becomes. The place of Léopoldine in the Hugo family becomes crucial—we learn that she was 'everyone's favourite' and it is implied that Adèle feels guilt for her death, because of jealousy. The false identities she assumes give her a certain callous energy—Adèle has the vigour and will of a crusader as she collects her money, trails her lover, writes her journal, until a crucial scene in which she seeks the help of a stage hypnotist. She has watched him hypnotise a bellicose Mountie into submission, and goes to his dressing-room afterwards to ask his help. She assures him that her father is rich (he is the only person to whom she confides his identity—and that by writing his name on the dusty mirror, and immediately afterwards expunging it) and she asks the hypnotist whether he can change love into hate and vice versa. He demurs, but finally agrees to try, adding that it will be expensive. At that moment the Mountie is revealed to be an accomplice. For a second she sees her own deceits and disguises swept aside; she is horrified, and from that moment topples into lunacy.

The final third of the film makes sense of Isabelle Adjani's blank performance in the preceding episodes. She starts to wear spectacles, her dress begins to fall into tatters, and in one memorable shot when she is stalking the lieutenant she crouches in a ditch, for all the world like a fox, while the soldiers ride by like huntsmen. Adjani has the petulant prettiness of a young Jeanne Moreau—but she does not have anything approaching Moreau's screen presence. It is curious to see Truffaut reducing an actress's power to affect our emotions. One is so used to seeing him liberating beautiful girls like Catherine Deneuve and Jacqueline Bisset and making them give performances one would never expect of them. In *Adèle H.* Truffaut seems determined to prevent humanity from entering until madness descends. Once she has lost all sense of reason and proportion, she becomes an appallingly poignant figure. The

prey has lost all meaning—only the habits of pursuit remain. The penultimate scenes in Barbados have the grandeur of an operatic mad scene. It is as if Truffaut has had the image of the dishevelled, unseeing, endlessly walking figure from the start, and only when we see Adèle in the depths does the puzzling austerity of the film come into focus.

This is Truffaut's most overtly moral film, as well as his blackest. He writes in his preface that he is incapable of making films 'against', so he keeps on filming 'for'. *Adèle H.* is not a sermon about passion, but it is a cautionary tale about love which comes from a most unexpected source.

JULIAN JEBB

The Last Tycoon

Apart from the retarding effects of poor health, drink and an unhappy scriptwriting career, Scott Fitzgerald's painful labour over *The Last Tycoon*, unfinished at the time of his death from a heart attack in 1940, says something about the intensity of his ambitions for the novel. This was to be a highly concentrated, refined work, of all his novels closest in style to *The Great Gatsby*, with details selected to 'fit a given planned mood or "hauntedness" . . . and always starting from the small focal point that impressed me.' *The Last Tycoon*, he wrote to Zelda, would be a 'constructed novel like *Gatsby*, with passages of poetic prose when it fits the action, but no ruminations or sideshows like *Tender*.' What the small focal point allowed—with hallucinatory precision in *Gatsby* and vaguer suggestiveness in *The Last Tycoon*—was a sense of intimacy with the ill-fated dreamers Fitzgerald held up as both the ideal and the lost hope of his continent; the 'hauntedness' was the feeling that it was impossible afterwards to describe their features, or to say for sure that they had existed.

The expensive productions recently mounted on these minor classics of wishful thinking thus seem like the cruellest trick played by Hollywood on Fitzgerald. With millions of dollars, all-star casts, and overflowing period stuffing, the dreams inevitably become one vast sideshow. Under cover of ever more meticulous surface fidelity, however, the betrayal becomes more elaborate. Executed with literal-minded and well-intentioned naiveté in Jack Clayton's *Great Gatsby*, it resounds more ironically and self-consciously through the equally chilly spaces of Sam Spiegel/Harold Pinter/Elia Kazan's *Last Tycoon* (CIC), which spends an exquisitely tedious amount of time tracking round the novel and in the process serving neither Fitzgerald nor, it would seem, any of the three current authors.

What is immediately deceptive about this *Tycoon* is not that it has transported intact so much Fitzgerald scenery and dialogue, but that it goes even further in taking up the writer's cause against Hollywood. Studio supervisor and boy wonder Monroe Stahr, made up of equal parts of Fitzgerald himself and MGM's legendary production chief Irving Thalberg, soars and dips through the extant sections of the novel like a kind of sun god who 'saw a new way of measuring our jerky hopes and graceful rogueries and awkward sorrow . . .' While Stahr retains his grip on the means of production at the dream factory, Fitzgerald retains an ambivalence about the screen's capacity for magic. But inevitably Stahr must be dispossessed, from within by his hopeless pursuit of the mystery girl, Kathleen Moore, who reminds him of his dead wife, and from without by the machinations of the studio executives. Pinter's screenplay anticipates the Hollywood in-fighting and hypocrisy, which exists only in Fitzgerald's notes for the uncompleted sections of the book, by making the general tone more distantly cynical, more brittle and knowing, and

thus more satirical but less perceptive about Hollywood.

In the novel, Stahr is a remote but never an impersonal god. He is fascinatingly seen working the levers of power in script conferences or viewing rooms, exercising his veto, for instance, on a selection of takes that have emphasised the top of Claudette Colbert's head. The film's Stahr is a wholly detached being, the pauses and inflections Pinter has brought to Fitzgerald's dialogue serving to maroon him in frosty rituals of power. (Robert De Niro glides effectively enough through these, even faintly resembling Thalberg in three-quarter profile shots, though the occasional eruption of his street-savvy *Taxi Driver* grin seems an incongruous signal for the self-made Stahr's lack of any formal education.) Most destructively, the interpolated glimpses of work in progress at Stahr's studio, reduced to excerpts from one continuing romantic melodrama featuring Jeanne Moreau and Tony Curtis as screen idols of the day, provide no purchase on either the myth or the reality of the movies. Parlour game pastiches, written and directed with a zig-zagging sense of period (the shade of *Casa-blanca* hovers over one night-club scene), and at a dragging pace that fits the present film more than it does the 30s, they merely seem excuses for further Pinteresque exercises in dissociation.

Such games, presumably, would have had little interest for Kazan, and in a way the infinite, airy pointlessness of this project seems the result of a collaboration between two irreconcilable temperaments, who have chosen to avoid collision by politely gliding round one another (and Fitzgerald). Even as Kazan, one suspects, was tempted to probe for some emotional reality to Stahr's fascination with Kathleen (Ingrid Boulting), Pinter's delivery reduces the relationship to one more artificial sliver of the Hollywood dream. Hence the long drawn-out, baffled mood of the scene where Stahr takes Kathleen to his unfinished seashore retreat. An interlude in which she abandons this skeletal shrine to walk barefoot in the grass seems to assert the soothing measure of reality she brings to the sleeplessly dreaming prophet, even while the stilted writing and playing keeps them apart as poseurs in their separate playlets.

Not surprisingly, the most successful scene in this epic of paralysed self-consciousness is Stahr's interview with the disgruntled English writer Boxley (Donald Pleasence), in which the

'*The Last Tycoon*': Kathleen (Ingrid Boulting) in the studio flood sequence



godhead is for once seen to be engaged in his work by acting out the peculiar psychology involved in 'making pictures'. For the rest, the movie-punning slant adopted by the filmmakers coldly encloses the romantic myth in quotation marks—when Stahr, for instance, repeats the 'making pictures' speech directly to the audience at the end, or when the earthquake which will introduce him to Kathleen is anticipated by an old studio guide's lecture on how earthquake effects are produced in movies. It is a strangely embalming process, which finally preserves only the most narcissistic aspects of Fitzgerald's attempt to exorcise some private ghosts from Hollywood's haunted house.

RICHARD COMBS

The Moon over the Alley

In an age embarrassed by romanticism, *The Moon over the Alley* (Rita Jarvis), with its curious, uncomfortable mix of songs and sentimental naturalism, is bound to look like an anomaly. It is not so much a musical as a drama with musical colouring, and in structure as well as style it evokes several distinct traditions. The film's urban working-class community, gravitating round a lodging house in the decaying terraced hinterland of Notting Hill, has its origins in a certain kind of British post-war realism (Ealing in serious mood). The violence to people and place, along with the fatalism which accepts it as a familiar event in these parts, belongs to a sharper neo-realist inheritance. But the songs, and particularly the ubiquitous and focal presence of an elderly street-singer and her barrel organ accompanist, recall an altogether different, theatrical tradition: street-singer Sybil and her simple-minded companion Little Acki are *Moritatensänger* in the style of the Brecht-Weill musical dramas. Ancestry so mixed inevitably produces a hybrid, a compound as variegated as the nationalities which make up the film's own cosmopolitan community.

But diversity of influence is not necessarily a bar to originality, and *The Moon over the Alley* is refreshingly original. It achieves this despite the fact that its stylistic poles are frequently pulling in different directions. The opening, a gloomy rendering of the title song and a glimpse of the full moon in a threatening sky, is promptly undercut by the first and full-blown appearance of the blowsy Mrs Gussett (Erna May), the German landlady of the house where most of the characters live. Mrs Gussett's energetically broken English ('Waken up, you laying-about') promises comedy of a fairly low order, but the Indian who turns up on her doorstep looking for a room walks away muttering darkly about 'blood on the moon'. This sinister moon is employed as a fate motif, periodically echoed in the ominous musings of the street-singer (Doris Fishwick) to her little friend (Peter Farrell) as they shuffle off down the alley where they sleep. Sybil and Little Acki observe rather than participate in the film's narrative events, a pivot for its frequent oppositions of style and subject.

These oppositions are basic. A literally disintegrating community (the film ends with the demolition of the lodging house) is precariously held together by the defiant optimism of Mrs Gussett and her multi-racial community of lodgers—Irish barman, Jamaican couple, American drifter. The narrative keeps them together by means of interlocking stories, as the characters drift in and out of each other's lives. As often as not, this is done by using the songs as a kind of punctuation. The Jamaican girl sings to her baby, for instance, and there is an almost imperceptible cut to the pub where the Irish barman is listening to the same song, which is finally taken up by the street-singer as she passes the pub.

The matching of music and narrative is not always so adroit. Towards the end naturalism

becomes increasingly dominant as the moon's symbolic threat takes shape in some very real violence. An old man, another of Mrs Gussett's lodgers, is savagely beaten up by a gang of youths who then move on to attack Mrs Gussett's son and his girlfriend. This violence, though amply foretold, upsets the balance between songs and narrative which until this point (and despite such jolting interludes as a street demonstration broken up by the police in Portobello Road market) the film has just managed to hold. A superfluous sequence in a Soho strip club contributes to the disjointedness of this section. And the songs here are noticeably more illustrative than interventionist in the Brechtian sense, less a 'report on the events' than an adjunct to them. Both musically and structurally the film loses its rhythm.

But there is always a danger of that in a film which so consciously mixes its metaphors. The remarkable thing about *The Moon over the Alley*, made on a shoestring for the BFI Production Board by Joseph Despins (director) and William Dumaesq (script and lyrics—the attractive music is by Galt MacDermot), is that for so much of the time it successfully blends its variety of musical and narrative traditions. Despins and Dumaesq, whose earlier *Duffer* was also set in Notting Hill (and also ruffled a few critical feathers), have not entirely surmounted the limitations of their budget: the lighting is sometimes indifferent, the performances uneven, and the editing testifies to a shooting ratio too low for comfort. But their film is a genuine original, and deserves a better reception from audiences than it got from reviewers disconcerted by its mix.

DAVID WILSON

Cross of Iron

Never having shown great ease or interest in orchestrating his plots, Sam Peckinpah has been most successful when either obliterating them entirely (*Pat Garrett*) or setting them chasing their own tails (*Alfredo Garcia*). His more personal projects have been distinguished from the commissioned 'entertainments' (*The Getaway*, *The Killer Elite*) by a feeling in the latter of creative energy turning sour as it struggles to find metaphorical truth in banal or confused yarns. The central problem of *Cross of Iron* (EMI) is that it works both ways at once. The ingredients of a wartime potboiler (not surprising, given the basis of Willi Heinrich's episodic novel about a German platoon on the Russian front in 1943) combine with an exploration of moods beneath the narrative that qualifies the film as one of Peckinpah's best, and the cinema's most complex, sardonic testament on the Second World War.

A more immediate problem is the film's treatment of a familiar topic—the ruthless expenditure of lives in the name of ideals—from the alien perspective of men fighting for the Nazi regime. A delicate issue, which the makers have objectified in various ways. Behind the opening credits, an elaborate newsreel montage twists the spectator through scenes of national guilt and individual helplessness: the founders of the Thousand Year Reich preside at tumultuous rallies; defeated soldiers bleakly confront the camera; Hitler Youth scale mountains and small children play war games. The final titles cap this rondo with a theme of universal complicity: a quote from Brecht's *Arturo Ui* on the end of Hitler ('Don't rejoice in his defeat, you men. For though the world stood up and stopped him, the bitch that bore him is in heat again') is preceded by a catalogue of the wars since, reflected simply in the faces of their youngest victims.

Within the film, careful and rather schematic distinction is made between the men of Sergeant Steiner's platoon (viewed objectively as soldiers whose sole business is the respect-worthy



'The Moon Over the Alley': Peter Farrell, Doris Fishwick

struggle for survival), the one party member of the group, Zoll (whose contemptible political zealotry is implied but never shown), and the various officers, from the aristocratic despot Stransky to the humanely resigned Brandt and Kiesel (who share in responsibility for the carnage that is done around them). Explicitly, the film revolves on the clash between the pragmatic veteran Steiner (James Coburn), whose maverick prowess in combat does as much to sustain morale as it does to undermine discipline, and the newly arrived battalion commander Stransky (Maximilian Schell), who asserts a Prussian code of unquestioned authority and automatic privilege, and covets the Iron Cross which Steiner wears so casually. Their exchanges, inevitably, are duels fought across the lines of rank, class and status, occasionally taking in a tetchy existential aside.

This much Peckinpah and his writers have taken from Heinrich, intelligently adapted and much better organised than in the novel. What they have added is a complex of relationships and parallels which further distinguishes the worlds occupied by the two men—only in order, finally, to unite them. In a way that recalls the Dundee/Tyreen split in *Major Dundee*, providing a pessimistic reading of the concepts of self and honour bloodily reconciled in that film, Steiner's cynical nihilism and Stransky's cynical authoritarianism will merge in a murderous pact that defines Peckinpah's ultimate image of war.

The spectre in the credit sequence of childhood innocence threatened by war (and of childish delight in such destruction) attaches itself, as with so many Peckinpah heroes, to Steiner. Here the naive equation is deepened by the clear identification of Steiner's platoon with the actual children he may already have lost. The war that has created his isolation has also provided him with an alternative home and family; as he rushes back to the front at one point from a rehabilitation centre, the implication, as Sister Eva (Senta Berger) accuses, is not that he is eager for the fighting but that 'you are afraid of what you will be without it.' A Russian boy soldier (Mikael Slavco Stimac), taken prisoner by the platoon and kept alive in their bunker against Stransky's orders, serves for a while as a realistic touchstone for this feeling. Killed when Steiner tries to send him back to his own lines, he reappears in the delirium of images after Steiner is wounded in

battle—a sudden sunburst of ostensible freedom, as the bandaged Steiner runs through an open field, becoming one more sliver of nightmare as Eva rescues the dazed soldier from a river. The boy is finally invoked as a dream nemesis when Steiner, his platoon destroyed by Stransky's efforts to kill the one man whose testimony can cancel his prospects of an Iron Cross, challenges the Prussian to meet the enemy advance with him, in a suicidal surrender to the destruction they have helped unleash.

In a deceptively easy combination of emotional closeness with intellectual distance (the latter made more difficult by the fact that he has chosen stylistically to keep the film screwed so close to the characters), Peckinpah defines Steiner's fighting unit with none of the indulgent camaraderie found in most war films and often imputed, with more or less justification, to his own. Partly this is a result of the casting—an uncommonly successful amalgam of international stars and German character actors which simply ignores language differences—and partly of Peckinpah's attempt to suggest the precarious emotional unity of men who are unsentimentally seen as expendable. While Steiner's platoon are celebrating their company commander's birthday, one man breaks down in despair at the futility of the exercise, an outburst only ended when another kisses him violently on the mouth. The incident is intercut with a scene in Stransky's quarters, when he observes in a mirror his adjutant Triebig (Roger Fritz) fleetingly caressing a young orderly, and then slyly taunts the two before threatening to have them hanged if they are ever caught together. The formal paralleling of the two scenes sets them both at a reflective distance, as though Peckinpah were quizzically mirroring the all-male groupings of the past.

Going further, the film gradually turns to confront the dark side of Sergeant Steiner; and the tactful but rather superficial distinctions between Nazis and Germans, warmongers and victims, finally seem less important than the movement that implicates all participants in the holocaust. There is a hint in an introductory passage when, shortly after Stransky's arrival, Kiesel (David Warner), the regimental adjutant, compares his fanaticism with Steiner's and remarks, 'Steiner is a myth... that men like him are our last hope. And in that sense, he is a truly dangerous man.' In the film's two-part

structure, divided by Steiner's hallucinatory period of convalescence, the madness of war is first defined, physically and emotionally, as an explosive darkness, in which individuals have variously rationalised their presence—a process which in the second part is revealed as a vast network of illusions.

Equally precise and clear-sighted is Peckinpah's re-creation of the punishing conditions of combat. This has excited in the press predictable protests at blood-soaked mayhem, but actually describes a complete—for the most part, surprisingly unbloody—spectrum of violence, from the constant wearying pressure of rumbling artillery and spectacular detonations, to the impossible confusion of hand to hand combat, the surreal images thrown up by Steiner's battle-hangover in hospital, and finally the flesh-tearing agony as his platoon is pulled to pieces around him. Most touching, because most intimate and inexplicable, is the carry-over from the moment when Steiner, fractionally suspended in slow motion, tosses away a spent cartridge case, to the action of the Russian boy, tossing his harmonica back to Steiner, who has just unwittingly despatched him to his death in no-man's-land.

RICHARD COMBS

Spite Marriage

Perhaps the most noticeable aspect of *Spite Marriage*, Buster Keaton's last silent film, which until its recent acquisition by Harris Films had been unseen in this country for several decades, is its complete lack of the structural cohesion which marks Keaton's finest work. In effect, it's two entirely different movies: one set in a theatre with Keaton as Elmer, the humble and totally infatuated admirer of the star (Dorothy Sebastian) of the appalling Civil War melodrama being presented, who goes backstage with a bouquet, finds himself taking a bit player's role, and causes the inevitable chaos; the other concerning high jinks on the high seas as Elmer and Miss Sebastian become the prisoners—and of course eventual captors—of a gang of bootleggers. By way of an entr'acte we have a traditional vaudeville routine, performed with masterly inventiveness, in which Keaton tries unsuccessfully to get the inert body of Miss Sebastian,

who has drunk herself into oblivion, undressed and into bed; the device used to introduce this routine is the marriage referred to in the title, which plays no further part in the film.

The hiatus between the two halves is so absolute as to make one wonder whether it might have been deliberate—whether, for reasons best known to themselves, MGM might have envisaged the possibility of splitting the film into two shorts. Certainly Keaton was limited by studio control in other aspects of the film. The very fact that *Spite Marriage* is a silent comedy is evidence of that; Keaton, though not wishing to make a non-stop talkie, had wanted to use sound. And no other Keaton feature contains such limited use of exterior locations. Even on the yacht much of the action takes place below decks, and was presumably shot in the studio. Unlike the liner in *The Navigator*, an enormous prop whose comic possibilities Keaton incorporated into the script, this yacht remains just a background like any other. Little sign here of the painstaking auteur who boasted of having recreated the Civil War with greater historical accuracy than *Gone With the Wind*.

Significantly, the sequences in which Keaton is most memorable are those which come closest to being theatrical set-pieces: the putting to bed of Miss Sebastian, which in later years Keaton did in fact revive as a theatrical routine for his performances at the Cirque Médrano in Paris; a fine scene in which he struggles to glue on a false beard. And odd individual gags stand out: Elmer bumping into a lamp-post and absent-mindedly lifting his hat to it in apology; Elmer, waist deep in a flooded engine room, discovering that his bucket is too large to be emptied out of the porthole (with a subsequent cut to him wringing out the cloth with which he has just mopped up the last drops of water). Many of these are brief enough to be missed at a first viewing—the fleeting moment at the end of the first act of the play, for example, when Elmer, applauding wildly, puts two fingers in his mouth to start to whistle before remembering his surroundings and hurriedly withdrawing them. Or an instance in a nightclub, where Elmer is about to light Miss Sebastian's cigarette in an attempt at elegant courtesy when someone pushes past his chair, upsetting his poise; there is in such minor incidents a quality of exquisite understatement of a sort that one would normally associate more readily

with Harry Langdon than with Keaton.

Keaton seems to have exercised greatest control over the theatre section, which would indeed make quite a successful short, for within itself it is most intelligently structured. A problem for the comedy writer planning scenes of disruption is that of establishing a context formal enough to serve as a yardstick by which to measure the outrageousness of the comedian's actions, which is also dislikeable—or unreal—enough for the spectator to accept its subversion with equanimity. (Hence, for example, the Marx Brothers' fondness for such confined, formal contexts as house parties, ocean liners and Margaret Dumont.) The difficulty is here overcome with brilliant simplicity by the device of running twice through the same section of the melodrama, raising laughs at its expense while setting it up as a formal structure to be undermined by Elmer's disruptive presence on stage at the next performance.

The stage conventions and artifice are thus exposed with surgical ruthlessness: the shot of a stage-hand imitating horses' hooves with a pair of coconut shells, which cuts to a title: 'Whoa!'; the male lead shooting at unseen pursuers as he makes his first entrance, and managing to bow to the audience at the same time; Elmer, backstage, stepping through the door in a flat stacked against the wall (a subtle but delightful gag that crops up again in Donald O'Connor's 'Make 'em Laugh' routine in *Singin' in the Rain*).

Once Elmer is actually on stage, Keaton's influence is particularly evident. The sequence is clearly the work of someone who has an extremely detailed understanding of how a theatre works, in a way that, for example, Harry Langdon's destruction of the music hall at the climax of *The Strong Man* is not. Where the Langdon/Capra sequence relies upon such devices as a misdirected stage cannon, Keaton's consists of an accumulation of the kind of small accidents that, taken singly, any actor is familiar with: a piece of scenery being knocked over; a backdrop descending from the flies at the wrong moment; someone missing a cue. He demonstrates a particular awareness of the stage as a formally defined space, whose conventional limits he violates continually, blundering on from the wings, crawling out from under the backdrop and finally, pursued by an irate theatre manager, falling into the orchestra pit and making his escape underneath the stage.

But this section of the film, though substantial, remains divorced from the rest; and the rest is much thinner in texture. Taken as a whole, *Spite Marriage* is by no means unfunny; but from Keaton we expect not only laughter but the satisfaction of seeing comic inspiration sustained throughout the length of the work by impeccable craftsmanship. And that satisfaction is, sadly, not to be had from *Spite Marriage*.

ALLAN T. SUTHERLAND

'Cross of Iron'



National Film School Films

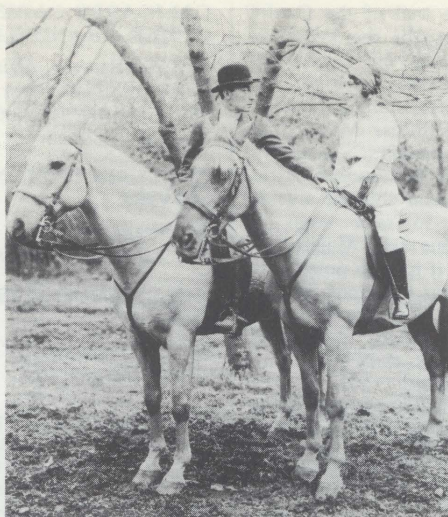
The annual presentation of new work from the National Film School makes for one of the National Film Theatre's odder events, with the students managing to introduce into it something of the chaotic over-excitement of an end-of-term concert. The films that appear on the screen tend to be quite different from those billed in the programme booklet. The students themselves promenade the auditorium throughout the shows, trampling usherettes, quarrelling with the ticket lady, reacting enthusiastically to their own films and standing in their seats chatting through the work of their colleagues.

This does not make it any easier to decide just what it is one should be looking for in student films—competence or wayward brilliance; academic correctness or avant-garde

adventure. Competence, at least, characterised the two dozen films selected for this year's showings in February, but when there was no more than competence (a *Look at Life*-class documentary handsomely shot in the Himalayas) the prospect could be dispiriting. Conversely, perhaps the most encouraging aspect of such shows is to have evidence of growth and improvement, as in the case of Heather Holden. Her 1975 student work, *Blackpool by the Sea*, is a very old hat impression film, dawdling a long way behind the footsteps of *Sunday by the Sea* and *O Dreamland*, and ineptly set to Scott Joplin rags. Two years on, in *Ideal News*, she has enormously developed her style and range to sharp, economical satire, juxtaposing the fantasy worlds of the Ideal Home Exhibition with Britain's economic realities.

It was another documentary which stole the show. *Pride of Place*, directed, edited and recorded by Dorothea Gazidis, is a *cinéma-vérité* account of a girls' smart private school. Even if finally you cannot believe things can be quite this bad (could there be a school without even one sympathetic teacher to merit the girls' crushes?), it is a marvellous horror comic about the way that upright women, all imagination overcome, suppress their lively charges with Christian, social and domestic virtues, binding them, as with chains, with blazers and Cash's name tapes.

Elsewhere, documentary film-makers appeared resistant to the Griersonian 'creative treatment' which distinguished Holden's and Gazidis' films. Students tend to be fascinated just by the marvel of people talking in front of the camera, and mistrust their own interposition (Alan Coddington's *Greenhouse*; Dimitris Vernikos' *Nicholas*). Especially in political and social 'documentary', the style seems to be simply to



Buster Keaton and Dorothy Sebastian in 'Spite Marriage'

record statements without attempting to marshal the material. Thus Mike Rosen's *Fight the Cuts* and *Save ETV* turn out as successions of people wittering and griping on, without any real force of argument or debate. (It seems not to matter: these films are apparently very popular with local trade union branches.)

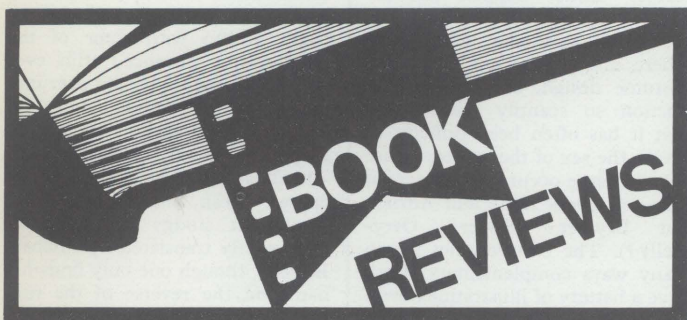
This year's crop shows an increased emphasis on dramatic films, presumably reflecting the growth of a new screenwriting department at the school. Students have overcome the earlier tendency to use up all their time and budget in making a three-minute fragment of a notional blockbuster feature to demonstrate (they hoped) their competence to undertake a full-scale

dramatic film; and now seem to be battling seriously with the testing problem of the short story structure.

Far and away the most successful in this respect was James O'Brien's adaptation of a Doris Lessing story, *Woman on a Roof*, a very skilful manipulation of the actors, the setting and the relationships between three workmen, changed by the exciting presence of a sun-bathing woman on a nearby rooftop. Ben Bolt's *Shadows of Doubt*, boasting as its leading players John Hurt and Patrick Allen, is as skilful with a more dramatic piece of action, though it comes as something of a surprise that the very atmospheric staging of what appears to be a fashionable turn-of-the-century continental spa is in fact supposed to be London in 1910. There was a like discrepancy between intention and outcome in Paul Miller's *Spiderweb*, which looked like a funny and slightly send-up homage to Feuillade, but was in fact meant as an adaptation of a Borges story.

Generally speaking, the students seemed at their best when taking things fairly lightly—Sara Jolly's lovely fragment about two working girls at the sea, *Out of Season*; Francine Winham's insolent little *grand guignol*, *Careless Love*—rather than with more self-consciously 'serious' themes like Neil Leveson's *Working Breakfast* (execution in British India) or Tony Attard's *Last Autumn* (lonely end of a Polish émigré). But even at their best, the new crop of school films promises a supply of efficient new television directors, rather than justifying Roger Crittenden's bold hopes (in his introduction to the programmes) that 'this shows evidence that the school has an important role to play in re-establishing the validity of an indigenous British Narrative Film tradition.'

DAVID ROBINSON



THE BEGINNINGS OF THE CINEMA IN ENGLAND

By John Barnes

DAVID AND CHARLES, £7.50

There was an enchanted moment—well, it might have been a matter of weeks—when British cinema led the world. 'The rapid growth of the cinema in England in 1896,' writes John Barnes, 'put her temporarily ahead of any other country, with the possible exception of France.' It was a period, it is true, when an exhibitor could set himself up in business with a projector at under £50 and a stock of films selling at £3 apiece, which had cost considerably less in overall production costs.

The motion picture was an organic growth rather than an invention. The great watershed was in 1892 when Edison—or rather his English assistant, Dickson—organised the results of many years of optical, mechanical and photographic experiment and experience into the Kinetoscope, which showed

photographic moving pictures in a peepshow, and the Kinetograph, which photographed the films for use therein. It needed no great exercise of the imagination to conceive the ultimate stage, of combining these moving images with the magic lantern, projecting them on a screen so that the pennies and nickels could be collected from whole audiences, rather than from individual peepers. The race was on, in America, England, France and Germany; and by common consent the Lumière Brothers formally won it with their private demonstrations in the spring of 1895 and the first ever public movie show on December 28, 1895. All the way, though, they were neck and neck with Robert William Paul, who is the hero of John Barnes' story of *The Beginnings of the Cinema in England*.

Paul is an appealing figure. In 1895, when he was 26 and running a nice little instrument business in Haddon Garden, he was approached by two Greek gentlemen (John

Barnes has definitively established that these two legendary figures in cinema history were called Georgiades and Trajedes) who asked him to supply them with counterfeit Kinetoscopes. Paul was properly reluctant, until he made the delightful discovery that Edison, usually so wily, had neglected to patent the thing in Britain. So he was in business. When film supply became a problem, he devised his own camera, in collaboration with an American-born photographer, Birt Acres, who was to turn quite nasty about their respective contributions when, very soon, they parted company. Hearing of the Lumière experiments, Paul was not long in designing a projector, which he called the Theatrograph.

Paul and Acres dominated the first days of the cinema in Britain, energetically touring the country demonstrating the machine in halls and technical colleges, opening up the large market provided by the music halls, competing (unconsciously) for priority in producing the first news film, the first actualities, the first British fiction film (Paul's *Soldier's Courtship*, or Acres' *Arrest of a Pickpocket*?). Animated photographs proved such a hit in the music halls that other optical manufacturers, mechanics and do-it-yourself potterers rushed into the business with improvements, adaptations, sheer plagiarisms. They came out with a marvellous variety of names for them, and even when they didn't themselves change the names from one music hall to the next, the theatre

management or the poster printers would devise their own endless variations on terms like Animatograph, Kineopticon, Velograph, Beograph, Animatoscope.

This formative period of British cinema has until now generally rated no more than a paragraph in the history books. John Barnes has rigorously confined himself to the single year 1896, sifting through reviews in contemporary photographic and theatrical magazines, newspapers, fragmentary handbills, old letters, those colourful personal recollections of later days which must be accepted with such caution. The detail of the account gives a peculiar fascination to the triumphs and rivalries of these small-time pioneers, mostly working from addresses around the Clerkenwell Road area.

Mr Barnes' concern is more with the manufacturers of equipment than with the films of the time (which have already received a certain amount of attention, although vastly more research and analysis remains to be done) or the audiences. But there are fascinating sidelights in the contemporary reviews he quotes. There is still a genuine sense of wonder at the very fact of movement, and at the detail and lifelike quality of the pictures. The fascination for audiences accustomed to the quaint and clumsy illusion of movement afforded by mechanical lantern slides, is that not only the people but even each individual leaf at the edge of the picture is given motion.

Even if they hissed and booed

when the image was so badly lit that they could not see it, they seem in other respects to have been remarkably complaisant. John Barnes is, to the best of my knowledge, the first writer to point out that in the early days of projection Paul and Acres (and presumably Edison as well) were showing on the screen, at fifteen or sixteen frames a second, films which had been shot for the Kinetoscope at forty frames a second. Small wonder that the critics noted, albeit mildly, that pugilists seemed a little slow on their toes.

The movies made it in society even this early, so that John Barnes is able to devote a whole chapter to Royal Film Performances. There was a bit of a scandal when Acres, having poked his camera through

a hole in the wall of the Cardiff Exhibition, caught the Prince of Wales *scratching his head*. The Prince himself laughed it off, and gave Acres permission to shoot the wedding of Princess Maud. The royal photographers, Downeys, took their films to Windsor Castle, when the Queen showed a truly regal ability to take them or leave them alone: 'Her Majesty... sent to know if it were possible to repeat the views, but upon it being explained that a repetition would necessitate a certain amount of preparation, was pleased to withdraw her request.'

The only serious cause for regret in this attractive and meticulous piece of research is that the excellent selection of illustrations is so badly reproduced.

DAVID ROBINSON



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By Elizabeth Leese
BCW PUBLISHING, £8.50

HOLLYWOOD COSTUME DESIGN

By David Chierichetti
STUDIO VISTA, £7.95

Cinemagoers spend a good deal of time gazing at sets and costumes, though we tend only to take note of them if they're strikingly lavish, strikingly inappropriate or strikingly inadequate. The eye registers the fantastic worlds of Sternberg and DeMille, the 'modest' Hollywood domestic interiors (plush enough to be lived in by the art directors themselves), the offices at Scotland Yard with their hatstands and filing cabinets in-judiciously hogging the frame. Likewise, we appreciate the presence of costumes when the heroine treks through the Malayan jungle in evening dress or insists on displaying a fresh creation each time she enters a room. Critics and historians have followed this common neglect, treating costume and set designers to the bare minimum of critical attention or factual documentation (and the former cannot happen satisfactorily without the latter).

Amends have now been made. There are two recent books on costume design, an area of production so scantily documented that it has often been difficult to divine the sex of the person whose cryptic name occurs on the screen (one can guess Irene and Adrian, but Brymer? Royer? Orry-Kelly?). The two volumes are in many ways complementary. Both have a battery of illustrations, with almost every Hollywood female star parading herself in various kinds of finery and from various positions: Barbara La Marr in *Heart of a Siren* rests on a pile of cushions at an angle of forty-five degrees, looking languorously debauched in a Charles LeMaire dress which constantly sprouts into feathers and fronds; Barbara Stanwyck in *Executive Suite* stands bolt upright in a trim, no nonsense outfit by Helen Rose, imperiously holding a telephone receiver to her left ear. But the emphases of the texts differ. Apart from a brief, rather inconsequential piece on the role of *couture* and *couturiers* in cinema, Elizabeth Leese fills her pages with over 150 wonderfully exhaustive filmographies, with an accompanying title index stretching all the way from *Aaron Slick from Punkin Creek* to *Zoo in Budapest*. Like all marathon film lists, the filmographies and index are useful from many angles as a help to further research or a simple aid to memory: some dress designers worked so exclusively for their studio that we almost

have complete lists of studio productions for certain years. There is so much information here that one is uncharitably peeved when a minor name is omitted: where, for instance, is Dulcie Midwinter, who provided the few costumes necessary for the 1963 British production *The Reluctant Nudist*?

David Chierichetti's volume has 99 filmographies, presented with less loving detail. In support, though, is a survey of the Hollywood output grouped into chapters with titles like 'MGM Sparkle', 'Paramount Polish' and—rather desperately—'RKO Ingenuity'. Chierichetti hasn't space enough to offer anything more than a brief interpretative guide, quickly running through the designers' careers and personal problems (drink and bad temper seem the chief ones) as well as their stylistic traits. The illustrations haven't quite the glittering appeal of Leese's selection: the reproductions are dull and the actual choices are sometimes perverse—the dresses themselves may be lovely to look at, but the ladies inside them occasionally disappoint.

Léon Barsacq's book on film décor, from the superb quality of its reproductions alone, belongs in another class. First published in paperback as *Le Décor de Film* in 1970, with all the illustrations clumped together in the middle, the volume has been transformed into a sleek—and not prohibitively expensive—hardback, where the pages glisten with some of the most crisply produced stills ever put on to paper. One can peer into them and still find detail and shading, not vague patches of grey or strident blocks of black. The illustrations have been largely chosen afresh, and Barsacq's text (somewhat stodgy in style) has been neatly translated by Michael Bullock, though one only finds his name on the reverse of the title page. Elliott Stein, the book's editor, contributes fresh paragraphs and perky captions for the stills ('Carla Calamani faced with some very realistic dirty dishes in Luchino Visconti's first and best film, *Ossessione*'). Information is again abundant; this time there are 242 filmographies packed together at the back. Few of them are exhaustive (in Cedric Gibbons' case, it would be easier to list the MGM films he didn't receive credit for), yet it remains an exceedingly valuable survey of an uncharted area. Factual titbits and quotes from recent correspondence with the designers all make this section a treasure-trove: Ned Mann, one learns, was a professional roller-skater; Charles D. Hall, of Universal horrors, was a stage designer for Fred Karno.

Barsacq's own text is an oddity—part practical guide, part potted history and part aesthetic theory, with no strand continuing for very long or tying up satisfactorily with any other. One is often pulled up short by sentences which cry out for further explanation ('The first

typically British film, *Cavalcade*, was shot in 1932 in Hollywood') or by sketchy paragraph-length treatments of whole careers (why single out *A Night at the Opera* in a discussion of Gibbons?). Yet Barsacq's pages still contain much information and wisdom; how useful, for instance, to look afresh at Chaplin's films through a set-designer's eyes (he points out that only objects specifically related to gags were allowed to flesh out the basic stage scenery). Barsacq's practical experience in the French industry reaps rich dividends too. One learns that in order to attain perspective, the back reaches of sets are sometimes peopled with children dressed as adults; in Raymond Bernard's *Maya*, they were dressed as prostitutes.

GEOFF BROWN

FRITZ LANG

By Lotte H. Eisner

Edited by David Robinson

SECKER & WARBURG, £9.75

The product of prodigious research and many years of personal friendship, Lotte Eisner's book on Lang seems to have been pigeon-holed before its arrival as the definitive work on its subject. As it turns out, the ways in which it is (as a descriptive, anecdotal account of Lang's artistic personality) fairly balance the ways in which it isn't (as a flexible reading of that personality through the themes and motifs of the films). The prose correspondingly performs some unique, airily disconcerting swoops from finely observed detail to cloud-obscured generalisation. Objecting to the common description of Lang's early films as 'Expressionist', Mme. Eisner notes the elements of Viennese Secession style and Art Deco in the design of *Dr. Mabuse der Spieler*; but she assumes throughout a kind of undeviating 'progression' from the early to the late films and from the German through the American period.

The book's primary quality is its comprehensiveness—if it never integrates a complete Fritz Lang, it is indefatigable in pursuing the trails of multifarious Langs through four decades. In a way, Mme. Eisner is at her best picking out the threads in the carpet when she is least comfortable with the finished product. Nervous about the dehumanising expressionist element in Lang—the second part of *Die Nibelungen*, she is relieved to discover, 'replaces static stylisation with dynamism'—she is quick to assert its compensating visual values ('Nothing in Lang is facade; everything is three-dimensional and spatial. His *mise en scène* makes constant use of this space and he composes with it').

At other times, her efforts to save Lang from his own excesses lead to simple distortion. Having asserted that 'alongside dream and fantasy there is always Lang's documentary instinct,' she makes a rather bizarre claim for the documentary value of sequences

in *Metropolis*; while her insistence (reasonable up to a point) on Lang as storyteller, driving even his most metaphysical thrillers along with a mathematically controlled technique, overlooks the irrational, dreamlike forces that might be at work (particularly in the case of *Spione*, where the author also emphasises the streak of social commentary). In his own autobiographical statement at the beginning of the book, Lang says of his decision to enter the cinema that it was never a conscious choice, 'but emerged with the same curious, almost somnambulist certainty which I later felt with all my films.' It is exactly this element of 'dream and fantasy' with which Lotte Eisner seems unwilling to deal: 'a psychoanalyst might produce all kinds of interpretations; yet it may be no more than a love of the mysterious, atmospheric and unusual...'

But the book is excellent when it considers such elements as a part of Lang's intellectual background, and perhaps the best chapter is a treatment of the influences of expressionism and German romanticism in *Der müde Tod*, concluding with a note from Lang on his experience of an apparition of Death during a boyhood illness ('the horror made way for a kind of mystical ecstasy...'). It is just this background which one begins to miss with the move to America, which the author is inclined to see in terms of a simple advance, with Lang abandoning his baroque Germanic flourishes in favour of more discreet psychological symbolism and with a consequent gain in documentary realism. Ironically, while the argument is that Lang thus escaped the monolithic 'man trapped by Fate' motifs of his German films to define fate more in terms of men's characters, the view imposes its own determinism on the 'development' of his films.

A similar intransigence clouds the way in which Lang's personality is identified through all his works and many collaborations. Rather too many assertions are made of his uncredited contribution to the scripts of his films, but special pleading creeps in most noticeably in the treatment of his collaboration with Thea von Harbou. Laying all the sentimental excesses of their joint works at von Harbou's door, the author makes one dubious attempt to unearth the characteristics of the pre-Harbou Lang (logical construction and an economical style) in the 1919 serial-adventure film *Die Spinnen*, and tries to define their contributions to *M* by claiming for Lang a social awareness that goes beyond the 'human interest' of the script (the working-class mothers of the young victims are too overworked to collect their children from school). Dealing more objectively with the Lang-Brecht collaboration on *Hangmen Also Die*, Mme. Eisner traces the personalities of both (Brecht's 'metallic voice'; Lang's 'objective direction'), and provides interesting documentation on the various

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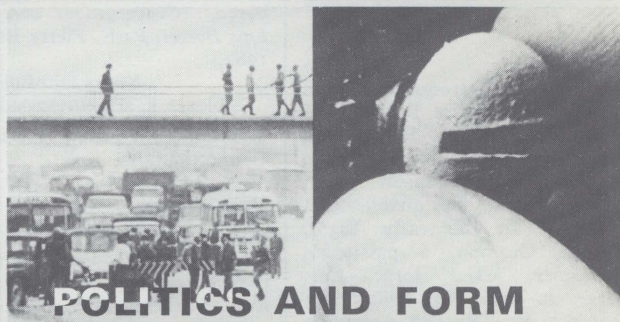
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squabbles involving writers and director, without really being able to account for the fiasco of the finished film.

A prodigy of information and collected opinions, in fact, this book calls out for more synthesis than the author manages in occasional bald statements of continuing themes ('the ambiguity of guilt, a breaking through a moral trap towards redemption and redefinition of identity...'). Essentially a book of refracted insights about the multi-faceted personality of Lang's work, it remains singularly useful (and practicably reliable) as an epic of scholarship and fact-finding.

RICHARD COMBS

The Art of Alfred Hitchcock, by Donald Spoto (Hopkinson and Blake, New York, \$13.00). Yet another exhaustive survey of the seemingly inexhaustible (in every sense) subject, Donald Spoto's *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock* tracks a picture by picture course through the Master's 53 works. It's a plump, opulent volume, with a dazzling silver jacket and an introductory note by Princess Grace, trap-pings which might camouflage the hard work Spoto has put into his study, and its combination of readability, standard analysis and less predictable insights. For Spoto,

the masterwork is *Vertigo*, which he has seen 26 times and which gets as much space to itself as he allows all the Hitchcock films up to *Secret Agent*. In general, Spoto seems eager to get Hitch safely on to American soil, and although he pauses in his trot through the early works for more reflective chapters on *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and *Sabotage*, he is far more creatively at home with the period of *Vertigo*, *Psycho* and *Marnie* than with English pictures like *Young and Innocent* (or, for that matter, *The Trouble with Harry*, that foxing sport from Hitchcock's middle years).

It's probably because the films' surfaces are so bland that they both attract and support such repeated analyses. A Hitchcock film is as wide open as the *North by Northwest* roadside, waiting for a crop-duster critic to descend. Spoto is particularly spry on some of Hitchcock's running motifs and concerns: the way his films have used birds (long before *The Birds*) and jewellery (long before *Family Plot*), for instance, as well as more obvious themes like the Hitchcock staircase, the falls from great heights, and the emphasis on performance and disguise.

Spoto is less of a textual analyst than Robin Wood, but he also feels less need to support his claims for Hitchcock with a range of cultural

comparison. When he does introduce a comparison, it can be unexpected, brief and telling; like, for instance, the notion that there is more in common than we might have thought between Hitchcock and Henry James, backed up by the striking suggestion that Alicia's first visit to Sebastian's house in *Notorious* has an emotional fabric which 'recalls the introduction of Isobel Archer to Madame Merle' in *Portrait of a Lady*. And did Hitchcock, as he suggests, perhaps get the idea for the *North by Northwest* plane scene from a passage in Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps* where Hannay is hunted on the open moor by a circling aircraft? I suspect that Spoto goes altogether too far when he suggests that Norman Bates' car number (NFB) might stand for Norman Francis, 'the saint frequently associated with birds'. But in the general context of adulation and analysis, it is more appealing occasionally to go overboard than never to risk getting a toe damp. Spoto calls Hitchcock one of 'the great creative moral cynics of our age.' The juxtaposition of words is unusual and just, and the text supports it. There is incidentally, as a bonus to an attractive book, an appendix reproducing the storyboards for the runaway car and the cemetery chase sequences in *Family Plot*.

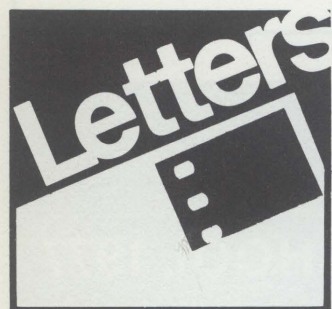
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UNITED ARTISTS for *Carrie*, *Network*.
COLUMBIA-WARNER for *Taxi Driver*.
BRITISH LION for *Don't Look Now*, *The Man Who Fell to Earth*.
EMI for *Cross of Iron*.
CONNOISSEUR FILMS for *The Middle Man*.
ACADEMY/CONTEMPORARY for *The Man Who Had His Hair Cut Short*.
EXCALIBUR for *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*.
HEMDALE INTERNATIONAL for *The Story of Adèle H.*
ACTION FILMS for *Providence*.
MERCHANT IVORY PRODUCTIONS for *Roseland*.
COLUMBIA PICTURES for photograph of Spielberg and Truffaut.
PARAMOUNT PICTURES for *Ministry of Fear*.
FILMEL-PHPG for *Alice, ou la Dernière Fugue*.
MARAN FILM, MUNICH/MONDIAL JEFI, ROME/CARTHAGE FILM for *Les Magiciens*.
BARNABE PRODUCTION for *Folies Bourgeoises*.
BUFFALO FILMS for *Les Apprentis Sorciers*.
LA NOUVELLE IMAGERIE, BRUSSELS/ALBINA PRODUCTIONS, PARIS for *Belle*.
METROPOLIS PICTURES for *Before Hindsight*.
INDIRA LANKESH PRODUCTIONS for *Pallavi*.
SHYAM BENEGAL/SAHYADRI FILMS for *Manthan*.
SURESH JINDAL/SATYAJIT RAY for *The Chess Players*.
DELHI FILM FESTIVAL for photograph of Satyajit Ray and Akira Kurosawa.
HUNGAROFILM for *Budapest Tales*.
USSR NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF CINEMATOGRAF RESEARCH for Stereo 70 picture.
BBC-TV/JOHN MCGRATH for *Diary of a Young Man*.
BBC-TV for *And Did Those Feet?*, *Up the Junction*, *The Black Madonna*, *Z-Cars*.
GRAHAM WADE for Local Cable Television photographs.
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NATIONAL FILM ARCHIVE for *Spite Marriage*.
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Borges

SIR,—In the introduction to a valuable selection of Borges' film criticism which you included in your Autumn 1976 issue, there is an ambiguous statement which perhaps needs some qualification. It says: 'In the early 1930s, Victoria Ocampo, a passionate moviegoer, asked Jorge Luis Borges to write film reviews for *Sur*, the distinguished Argentine literary journal which she had founded and still directs.'

Although it is a fact that Borges published articles on films in *Sur*, it is doubtful that he did so on Madame Ocampo's initiative. Chronology and Borges' own testimony seem to indicate a different interpretation. Two years before *Sur* came out, Borges was already writing about films (see 'El cinematógrafo, el biógrafo' in *La Prensa*, Buenos Aires, April 28, 1929) with a familiarity his friends know was based on a long habit of movie-watching. In his reminiscences, Borges has been explicit about Madame Ocampo's reluctance to include in *Sur* (which she

saw as an anthology of the best possible writing) things as ephemeral as reviews of plays, movies, concerts and books. Borges, on the other hand, believed them to be 'the life of a magazine,' according to what he once told Jean de Milleret, 'all that the reader wants to find.' With typical understatement he also pointed out: 'If he finds a 40-page article on Homer and a 50-page one signed Victor Hugo, he would feel bored.' (*Conversations avec Jorge Luis Borges*, Paris, Pierre Belfond, 1967.)

Yours faithfully,
E. RODRIGUEZ-MONEGAL

Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

New Writers

SIR,—I have just produced the first Anglo-Canadian co-production to be filmed in England, and would very much like to encourage some new, original screenwriters. I am sure that there are some talented writers who just need to be spurred on, and if they could write to me c/o Lee Film Studios (address as below), I would be very pleased to consider any ideas.

Yours faithfully,
PETER FETTERMAN

Fetter Productions Ltd.,
Lee International Film Studios,
280 Kensal Road,
London W10.

Lina Braake

SIR,—Your flip and wholly misleading description in your Film Guide of that original and memorable film *Lina Braake*—awarded a

solitary star—as a 'fuzzy piece of pensioners' agit-prop... couched in comforting sentimentality' once again suggests that if you are to continue this 'starring' feature you should provide your readers over undergraduate age with a pocket calculator to correct for the factors of intellectual pretentiousness and a sense of humour which apparently responds only to the nudgings of an Orson Welles, whose *F for Fake* gets three stars ('Dripping with self-consciousness?').

Yours faithfully,
HARRY HOPKINS
London NW8 0JN.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

NIGEL ANDREWS is film critic of the *Financial Times*... JULIAN JEBB is Assistant Producer of BBC-2's *Arena Cinema* programme... JONATHAN LEWIS was in the original intake of the National Film School and is a director of Metropolis Pictures. His films include *Jokes and Recipes*, *Horseboy* and *Before Hindsight*... JOHN MCGRATH is at present touring in Scotland with the 7:84 Company... CHARLES W. SMITH has been a film cameraman since 1945. Was assistant to the late Raymond Spottiswoode on technical direction of 3-D production at the time of the 1951 Festival of Britain and after, and cameraman and technical supervisor on *Royal Review*, the Pathé 3-D film of the Coronation... DAN YAKIR is a PhD candidate at Columbia University and is working on a book on contemporary French cinema.

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INTERNATIONAL FILM GUIDE 1977

Edited by Peter Cowie. "Each year it appears, the 'Guide' becomes more and more an essential part of contemporary film literature, because it combines reportage, opinion and factual information about world cinema so concisely."—John Williams, *Films Illustrated*. Price £2.50.

THE WESTERN

"A 'must' for any serious cinema addict of the Western. It is a reference volume, and the exhaustive index alone comprises over 3,500 titles, while the editorial matter itself consists of brief biographies of 404 film players, directors, screenwriters, cinematographers, art directors, and other workers whose names have distinguished the Western. . . . a credit to the industry and taste of Allen Eyles, who is a true Western aficionado."—DeWitt Bodeen, *Films in Review*. "For some years the author's paperback on the Western film has been a most useful book of specialised reference: it now appears in a much enlarged form, between hard covers, with many more entries and a full quota of illustrations. The magnificent index of films. . . is an invaluable asset."—Ivan Butler, *Film Review*. Price £4.25

THE MAKING OF KING KONG

By Orville Goldner and George E. Turner. "Those who want a lovingly detailed inside look at the creation of a classic movie, complete with credit lists and production stills galore, will be overjoyed at 'The Making of King Kong' even with its Kong-sized price."—Francis M. Nevins Jr., *Films in Review*. "Authoritative and wonderfully detailed and illustrated."—Elkan Allan, *The Sunday Times*. Price £7.00.

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Film Guide

**BARON FANTOME, LE

(Cinegate)

A real treat for admirers of Cocteau (who wrote the excellent dialogue and appears briefly as the phantom baron). Long written off as expendable on all counts, it turns out to be a delightful comedy-fantasy with an atmosphere not unworthy of *La Belle et la Bête*. (Jany Holt, Alain Cuny, Odette Joyeux; director, Serge de Poligny.)

BATTLE OF MIDWAY (CIC)

A lot of hardware and even more stars have gone into this representation of the 1942 Pacific battle. We are over-informed about the movements of every ship and plane, under-informed about how the battle was actually won, and positively swamped with tedious human interest. (Charlton Heston, Henry Fonda, Robert Mitchum, Toshiro Mifune; director, Jack Smight.)

CARRIE (United Artists)

Brian De Palma escalates a piece of Hitchcockian trickery into a rampaging horror-comedy. Sissy Spacek gives a fine performance that is almost lost in the camp amalgam of old movie lore, sexual chic and stylistic jiggery-pokery. (Piper Laurie, William Katt, Betty Buckley.)

CHARLOTTE (New Realm)

Inimitable Roger Vadim film in which a respectable writer (played by Vadim) researches a decadent playboy's proud claim that he murdered kinky Charlotte, unearthing flashbacks full of tinsel titillation. (Michel Duchaussoy, Mathieu Carrière, Sirpa Lane.)

*COUP DE GRACE

(Contemporary)

Visually stunning (grey, World War One battlescapes echoing *Thomas l'Imposteur*), but the script (Bolshevik scares and German nationalism in ceded Baltic territories following the Armistice) tends to plod. (Margarethe von Trotta; director, Volker Schlöndorff.)

**CROSS OF IRON (EMI)

The hell of war portrayed with all Peckinpah's disturbing brilliance; but also a subtly uncompromising analysis not only of the social motifs behind war, but of the complex metamorphoses it can work even on the good guys. (James Coburn, Maximilian Schell, James Mason.) *Reviewed.*

DREAMS OF THIRTEEN

(Oppidan)

A posturing Nicholas Ray attempts to exorcise his fear of incest; a pseudonymous Dusan Makavejev watches a loving couple playfully snarling at each other. Seven other male artists contribute perfunctory samples of intermittently amusing sexual graffiti. (Directors, Jens Jørgen Thorsen, Max Fischer, Lee Kraft, Oscar Gigard, Heathcote Williams, Geert Koolman, Hans Kanters.)

EAGLE HAS LANDED, THE

(CIC)

Himmeler despatches paratroopers to kidnap Churchill from an isolated Norfolk village. A mis-conceived attempt to invigorate an old-fashioned all-star war picture

by angling it from the point of view of the Germans. Drawn from a creakingly over-written bestseller. (Michael Caine, Donald Sutherland, Robert Duvall; director, John Sturges.)

**ECLIPSE (Gala)

A psychological poser in which a man confesses to the murder of his twin brother and is then guiltlessly welcomed into the widow's bed. Fastidiously crafted, refreshingly challenging example of British independent commercial film-making, based on a novel by Nicholas Wollaston. (Tom Conti, Gay Hamilton; director, Simon Perry.)

ENFORCER, THE

(Columbia-Warner)

Clint Eastwood tries to hold together this tired *Dirty Harry* re-run on sheer charisma, as the script tracks through a mire of psychopathic revolutionaries, corrupt politicians and anti-feminist gibes. (Bradford Dillman, Harry Guardino, Tyne Daly; director, James Fargo.)

JABBERWOCKY

(Columbia-Warner)

Curious half-sequel to *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* with even more prettily photographed medieval atmosphere and far fewer good jokes. Michael Palin plays the idiot hero Dennis Cooper, who slays Lewis Carroll's fearsome beast after encountering a mishandled array of British comic talent; only Max Wall pulls through with any honours. (Deborah Fallender, John Le Mesurier; director, Terry Gilliam.)

*KING KONG (EMI)

Arch remake of the Cooper and Schoedsack original, combining modish off-screen menace with peremptory animation. Unlike his predecessor, this modern Kong comes across less as a Freudian rape fantasy-cum-ecology symbol than as a lovesick Cheetah, despite the teasing sexual ambivalence of Jessica Lange in the Fay Wray role. (Jeff Bridges, Charles Grodin, René Auberjonois; director, John Guillermin.)

**KINGS OF THE ROAD

(Cinegate)

Surely the ultimate in Wim Wenders' explorations of man searching for himself on the open road under the aegis of rock-'n-roll. A slow and stately dream for film buffs that takes us on a hypnotic tour of the late lamented cinema's graveyard. (Rüdiger Vogler, Hanns Zischler.)

LAST TYCOON, THE (CIC)

F. Scott Fitzgerald's last novel turned into a romping ground for blockbusting producer Sam Spiegel, master of banalities Harold Pinter and troubled seer Elia Kazan. That the result is incoherent is no surprise; that it is so hollow and visually graceless adds a kind of wonder to the disappointment. (Robert De Niro, Ingrid Boulting, Jeanne Moreau, Jack Nicholson.) *Reviewed.*

LITTLE GIRL WHO LIVES DOWN THE LANE, THE

(Rank)

Jodie Foster blossoms into womanhood (in her first nude bedroom scene) all the while managing a kind of clearing house for the corpses of obstreperous adults. The precious intimacy of her relationship with a crippled boy magician and the homicidal clichés of the plot make the strangest of bed-fellows. (Martin Sheen, Alexis Smith, Scott Jacoby; director, Nicolas Gessner.)

**MIDDLE MAN, THE

(Connoisseur)

Satyajit Ray pursues his studies of men and jobs, as young Somnath Bannerji, after a disappointing exam result, plunges into the half-world of small-time commerce.

Deeply pessimistic in attitudes; wonderfully light, funny and observant in style. (Pradib Mukherjee, Satya Bannerjee, Sudeshna Das.) *Reviewed.*

NEXT STOP, GREENWICH VILLAGE (Fox)

Paul Mazursky turns the clock back to 1953 and his own Greenwich Village days, only to discover that there were possessive Jewish mothers played by Shelley Winters even then and that all aspiring actors were boringly serious admirers of the Method. There's some tartly comic observation, but the fragmented structure keeps the mixture inert. (Lenny Baker, Ellen Greene, Lois Smith.)

NICKELODEON (EMI)

Another uncritical homage to Hollywood by Peter Bogdanovich, this time employing ponderous slapstick and a pathetic parody of Harold Lloyd (by Ryan O'Neal) to evoke the early silent days. Pleasing performances, however, from newcomer Jane Hitchcock and Burt Reynolds, who proves his penchant for self-mockery. (Tatum O'Neal, Brian Keith, Stella Stevens.)

NORMAN... IS THAT YOU? (CIC)

Stagebound comedy about black parents coming to terms with the culture shock of their strapping son's love match with a mincing white boy. Gay jokes in abundance, but only a few of them survive the Broadway mechanics. (Redd Foxx, Michael Warren, Pearl Bailey; director, George Schlatter.)

**PINK PANTHER STRIKES AGAIN, THE (United Artists)

The accident-prone Inspector Clouseau at last takes a pratfall into sheer comic-book grotesquerie. Blake Edwards keeps pace with some quick-fire movie puns while filling the landscape with the Inspector's convincingly pained subordinates, even if the globe-trotting is becoming a little intrusive. (Peter Sellers, Herbert Lom, Colin Blakely, Leonard Rossiter.)

**PRIVATE VICES & PUBLIC VIRTUES (Eagle)

The Mayerling affair, characteristically abstracted by Jancsó into a socio-political ballet choreographing the teasingly murderous war between sex and repression. Visually superb, though the message is somewhat protracted. (Lajos Balázsovits, Pamela Villosi.)

*RAID ON ENTEBBE

(Hemdale)

One of the front runners in the year's most publicised show-business rip-off. Much better made than its hurried schedule and high adventure format would suggest, and directed by Irvin Kershner with some coolly atmospheric scene-setting, judicious performances and a subtle playing down of the political issues. (Charles Bronson, Peter Finch, Yaphet Kotto.)

SENTINEL, THE (CIC)

Michael Winner's entry in the black magic stakes, with a horde of lovingly made-up nasties finally summoned (by Burgess Meredith, no less) from Hades. Far less convincing are the preceding shenanigans, with a bewildered heroine rattling about a gloomy house while an ambiguous hero and a galaxy of stars potter on the sidelines. (Cristina Raines, Chris Sarandon, Arthur Kennedy, Ava Gardner.)

SEVEN-PER-CENT SOLUTION, THE (CIC)

Sorribly botched all-star extravaganza based on the potentially engaging alliance of those two searchers after truth, Sherlock Holmes and Sigmund

Freud; throws away its name cast. (Nicol Williamson, Robert Duvall, Vanessa Redgrave, Laurence Olivier; director, Herbert Ross.)

**SHADOWMAN (Connoisseur)

Georges Franju's extraordinary pulp fantasy out of Feuillade: a feature film made simultaneously with his TV serial *L'Homme sans Visage*. Fairytale encounters and violent death, in a tale of Knights Templar battling a criminal mastermind in contemporary Paris. (Jacques Champreux, Gayle Hunnicutt, Gert Froebe.)

*SQUEEZE, THE

(Columbia-Warner)

Michael Apter is no Don Siegel but he makes a fair fist of transferring the dirty cop thriller to Notting Hill. The action scenes have a real flair and the underworld types are sharply delineated, though Stacy Keach's problems as a drunken ex-copper are unengaging. (David Hemmings, Carol White, Stephen Boyd.)

STAR IS BORN, A

(Columbia-Warner)

Janet Gaynor and Judy Garland's Esther Blodgett is now Barbra Streisand's Esther Hoffman, a crinkle-headed star who sings the softest rock ever penned and marries the exhausted, half-drunk John Norman Howard (Kris Kristofferson). Given such a perfunctory up-dating the old story doesn't work at all; the result is coarser, far more sentimental and totally redundant. (Director, Frank Pierson.)

**SWEENEY! (EMI)

Lively transfer by David Wickes, best of *The Sweeney's* directors, of TV's hardest-bitten cops from the small screen to the large, successful despite an over-cosmopolitan plot and the insinuation of an *Avengers*-type assassination team. John Thaw and Dennis Waterman keep the proceedings at a realistic level. (Ian Bannen, Colin Welland.)

*TREASURE OF MATECUMBE (Disney)

A gang of sailors chase two boys down the Mississippi in hopes of beating them to a chest of sparkling prop gems. An entertaining if predictable yarn, spurred on by Vincent McEveety, with the bonus of Peter Ustinov as an engagingly loquacious quack pedlar. (Joan Hackett, Vic Morrow.)

TWO-MINUTE WARNING (CIC)

This sprawling inconclusive disaster picture (sniper threatens crowd at championship football game) marks another erratic departure for director Larry Peerce. A few taut action sequences fail to broaden a banal plot chiefly composed of small-screen domestic crises. (Charlton Heston, John Cassavetes, Martin Balsam, Jack Klugman.)

**WALK WITH LOVE AND DEATH, A (BFI)

John Huston's neglected contribution to the era of campus revolt and drop-outs making love not war, based on Hans Konigsberger's novel of the Hundred Years War. An elegant, intelligent film, at its best when opposing its essentially modern lovers (Angelica Huston, Assaf Dayan) to the barbarity and social antagonisms of the day. (John Huston, John Hallam.)

**WILD GAME (Contemporary)

Bleak dissection of a doomed teenage liaison, which ends in a futile murder. Fassbinder's naive antagonists are, once again, trapped by the intractable values of a disintegrating middle-class society. Moments of haunting desolation distinguish this ravaged, bitterly ironic melodrama. (Eva Mattes, Harry Baer.)

KING LEAR

The Space of Tragedy

The diary of a film director, kept during the filming of *King Lear*.

Grigori Kozintsev

The central theme of the diary is a day-to-day meditation on the play, interspersed with reminiscences on the early days of Russian Cinema with Eisenstein, on the influence of Meyerhold and his innovations in the theatre. Finally, linking all these themes, is the fascinating account of how the film was actually made. The diary concludes with a vivid portrait of Dmitri Shostakovich, who composed the music. There are 8 pages of stills from the film.

Kozintsev was born in Kiev in 1905. As a film director he is best known for his *Don Quixote* and *Hamlet*. He died in 1973, only a few months after the launching of *King Lear* in England.

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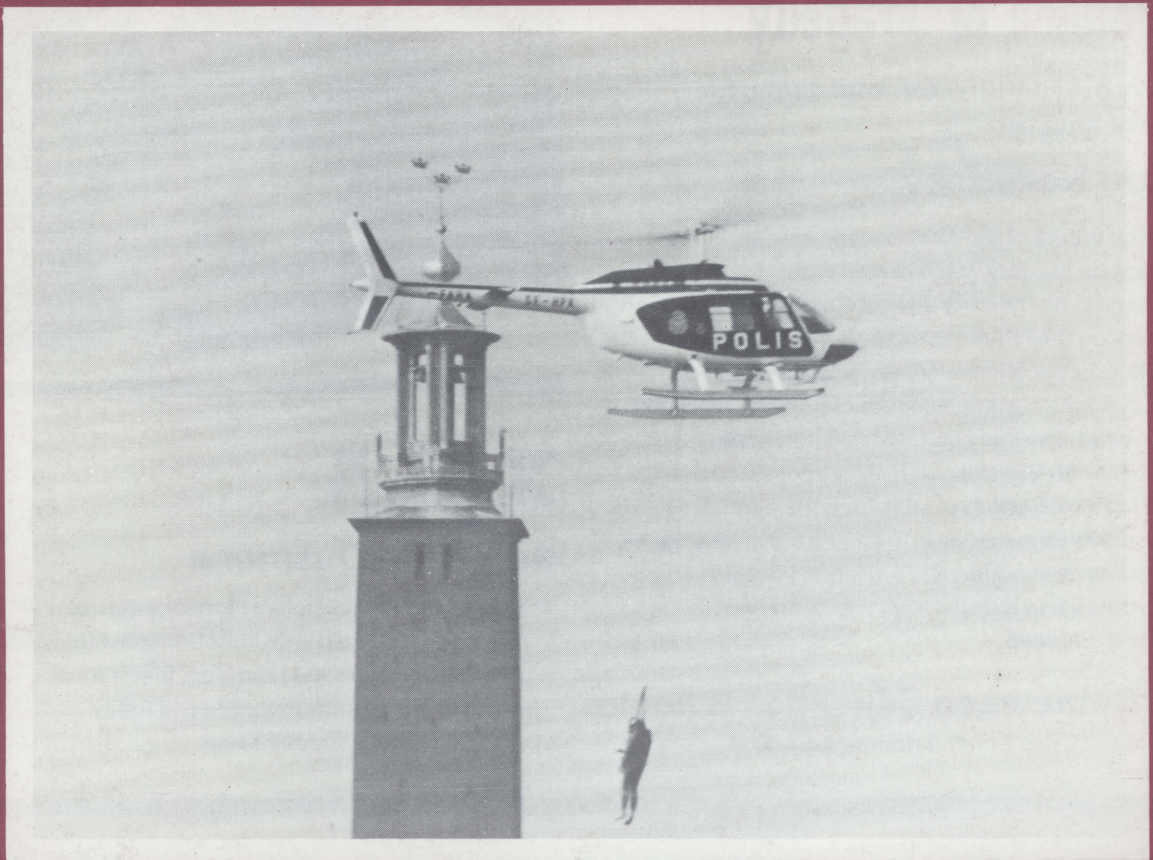
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Potamkin was one of the most important film critics of the 1920s and 1930s, with an international reputation based on his unusual acuity of judgment and his advocacy of cinema as a revolutionary art form. That his strongly Marxist orientation, in a time of profound economic and social upheaval, was a motivating yet not overbearing factor in his criticism is provocatively discussed in the introduction to this collection by noted film historian Lewis Jacobs. Jacobs is the authorized editor of Potamkin's film writings, and his definitive selection includes material never published before. Many illustrations from Jacobs' own extensive library are included.



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